

## EDITORIAL

The goal of the *Melanesian Journal of Theology* is to publish articles that theologically address issues facing the church in the South Pacific. We strive to publish articles authored by Melanesians, or, more broadly, South Pacific islanders, in an effort to create indigenous, biblically-based dialogue across the South Pacific to benefit the readers of this journal.

The four articles in this volume promote four theological themes: a theology of Christ (Christology), a theology of the last days (eschatology), a theology of the environment (ecotheology), and a theology of business. Each of the theological themes addresses an issue in front of the church today. To combat the continued influence that traditional religion has on Melanesians, Christ is magnified from the book of Colossians. To challenge the notion that the Bible is not for people of the South Pacific today, an eschatological framework for interpreting scripture is proposed. To fight the movement away from caring for creation in Melanesia, the term “ecotheology” is introduced. To encourage the success of church-affiliated businesses, a theology of business is developed, based on scripture, and in light of Melanesian culture.

The first theological theme, Christology, is the focus of Cliff Kiru’s article. In it, he explores the description of Christ as the “image of God” in the creedal hymn of Colossians 1:15-20. He is moved by his findings, as he ponders Christ in relation to his culture, emphasising that, if Christians in Melanesia truly knew and understood the Christ of Colossians, they would be drawn “out of their spiritual poverty”, and no longer pursue answers to life’s questions through traditional beliefs and practices.

The second theological theme, eschatology, is the focus of Ma’afu Palu’s article. He argues that the best way to interpret scripture is from an eschatological perspective. It is important to understand the big picture of God at work from creation to the final judgment to help us appropriate the truths of scripture to our lives, whether as 1st-century believers, or South Pacific believers today. To put feet to his approach, Ma’afu suggests several principles for reading the New Testament, specifically the Gospels

and Epistles, an approach he refers to as “Gospel Eschatological Framework”. His framework includes looking back to the Old Testament, and looking forward to Christ’s return, while maintaining the cross as the centrepiece. In a South Pacific context, where myths general define the past, and the future is not considered, his approach is a challenge to people today.

Timothy Kwara draws our attention to a theology of creation-care, or ecotheology. The article weaves together scripture and Melanesian culture, while drawing input from prominent South Pacific theologians. Timothy’s decidedly historical approach is refreshing, since it emphasises the legacy of theologians native to the South Pacific, rather than turning exclusively to the West. The article highlights the efforts by Solomon Islands’ theologian, scholar, and activist, Leslie Boseto, in promoting the conservation of nature. Timothy’s conservation emphasis is warranted in today’s global economic climate, as the islands of the South Pacific deal with harvesting their vast natural resources in a way that preserves the environment.

John Hitchen presents a theology of business in the final article. Historically, missionaries to Melanesia downplayed church involvement with business. John, nevertheless, sees a role that business ventures can play in the church today. However, operating business ventures in Melanesia are not without their challenges, including the need for transformation of traditional worldviews, to be able to operate within the global environment of today. John offers recommendations from scripture for operating a successful business – a theology of business. He uses the Christian Leaders’ Training College as an example of combining business with theological education, with the goal of providing cost-effective training for future Christian leaders of Melanesia.

We hope that the articles in this volume will challenge you to think deeply about theological issues facing Melanesia and the South Pacific.

Doug Hanson,  
Editor.

# **CHRIST SUPREME – AN EXPOSITION OF THE THEOLOGICAL MEANING OF “IMAGE OF GOD” IN COLOSSIANS 1:15 – ITS IMPLICATIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE, THEN AND NOW**

**Cliff Kiru**

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## **RATIONALE**

The doubt, which filters the minds of Christians, when placed at a crossroad between two forces: good and evil, divine and physical, eternal and temporary, when some form of calamities strike to test Christian faith, can only be put to rest with a proper understanding of the attributes of the “Image of God” and its significance. The motivation for this discussion is the importance of properly understanding the sphere in which Christ, as the image of God, operates, in terms of how He affects Christians’ perceptions of Him. This is important, because the actions of Christians are triggered and dictated by their own perceptions and understanding of who is the Christ of Colossians.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Christ of Colossians, presented by Paul as the “image of God”, with His supreme attributes, and their significance, is, indeed, the Christ I never properly understood. The fullness and identity of Christ is thoroughly simplified and expounded for human understanding, appreciation, and application by Paul using a method which sequentially incorporates the revelation of the supremacy of Christ. Such organisation and method had a threefold reason: firstly, to present Christ vividly to the Colossians as the basis of their faith; secondly, to address Colossian philosophy, in which the supremacy of Christ was intended to address, and, finally, reveal a specific code of conduct, which the Christians were required to take upon themselves. Such acquisition of a new code of conduct would reflect evidence of the indwelling of Christ, and was a weapon to fight the Colossian philosophy. It would also be a means, which contemporary Christians would need to use as a solid foundation for an active Christian faith.

This paper investigates, and reflects on, Christ as the “image of God” in Col 1:15, in the light of the Christological hymn in Col 1:15-23, as well as other Pauline epistles in general and the Gospels, as they point towards Christ. The use of the metaphor, which was a means to define the fullness of Christ, was an attempt to rescue the Colossians from the philosophy, and can be of great significance to us. In order to achieve that, an in-depth exegesis and exposition of the term “image of God”, with the implications and significance intended for the Colossians, is important, because the practice and response to our Christian faith can be brought to a complete understanding of who Christ is – the Christ of Colossians.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **LITERARY CONTEXT**

As will be noted later about how Paul designed the style and tone of his letter from prison, the Christ hymn is perfectly presented in poetry – a style that meaningfully addressed the problem he identified. N. T. Wright also supports this literary style: “Most scholars agree that the passage is skilfully

worded and rhythmically balanced, deserving to be called a poem”.<sup>1</sup> Regarding the poetic significance, Wright again comments: “Someone who writes in this way wants his or her readers to stop and think. The most obvious point that the poem makes is the parallel between creation and the new creation.”<sup>2</sup> The phrase “image of God”, presented in poetry, and placed at the most strategic section of the chapter, which is proven to be the peak of this entire New Testament, needs some attention. This attention must be paid to the echoes and overtones of the language and style (poetry) transmitted, as well as the intended outcome. Brian Walsh and Sylvia Keesmaat have a helpful insight to this:

In a world populated by images of Caesar, who is taken to be the son of God, a world in which the emperor’s preeminence over all things is bolstered by political structures and institutions, an empire that views Rome as the head of the body politic, in which an imperial peace is imposed – sometimes through the capital punishment of crucifixion – this poem is nothing less than treasonous. In the space of a short, well-crafted, three-stanza poem, Paul subverts every major claim of the empire, turning them on their heads, and proclaims Christ to be the Creator, Redeemer, and the Lord over all of creation, including the empire.<sup>3</sup>

Paul, who was an influential person in his society before conversion, knew the exact links to the gospel, and by choosing to employ poetry as the mode of delivery, was smart enough to know it was a well-favoured mode of communication in the Mediterranean world.

### **CULTURAL SETTING**

Paul’s identification of himself as the apostle of Jesus Christ, and the subsequent revelation of the supremacy of Christ, from whom he found his identity and motivation, is not just an ordinary letter to an ordinary church.

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<sup>1</sup> N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans. 1986, p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>3</sup> Brian J. Walsh, and Sylvia C. Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire*, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2004, pp. 83-84.

Rather, Paul carefully organised his arguments in a manner that would address the problems that were affecting the church. Some of these problems existed, even before the church came into existence, thus, they are worth of noting, because Paul's use of the phrase "image of God" prior to revealing the supremacy of Christ in the Christ hymn is highly intentional, and thus cannot be undermined. This means that the Colossian church was planted in the heart of a society and culture that was highly influenced by the Graeco-Roman culture – a culture whose worldviews, ideologies, and beliefs were capable of confusing, and even contradicting, the new faith. Regarding the location of Colossae, Lewis Johnson comments: "In the time of Paul, Colossae was attached to the Roman province of Asia. Colossae had been an important city, since it was situated on a well-used highway linking Eastern and Western Asia."<sup>4</sup> Another Graeco-Roman aspect of culture, which influenced the Colossian church, was Greek philosophy, which demands attention in order to shed some light on understanding Paul's reasons in using the phrase.

Jostein Gaarder's book on philosophy, titled *Sophie's World: a Novel About the History of Philosophy*, prompts a response as it grapples with the worth of humans, from the perspective of Christianity. Gaarder's book appears to leave one feeling as if they were floating in space, and, at other points, confused, or left experiencing a sense of anxiety, and even puzzlement, while reading through the respective parts that portrayed human life as having no real meaning and worth; of being here on earth by chance, with no real knowledge about what life will be like in future – a viewpoint strongly professed within Greek culture.

The Greek culture of Paul's day was dominated by the influences of renowned Greek philosophers, whose teachings and beliefs had been passed down from one generation to another, before the birth of Christ, and saw new philosophers emerging after Christ. One manifestation of these philosophies was that people believed that they could learn about their fate through oracles. One of these philosophies, according to Gaarder, was the oracle of Delphi, where Apollo, the god of the oracle, spoke through his

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<sup>4</sup> S. Lewis Johnson, Jr, "Studies in the Epistle to the Colossians", in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 118 (July-September 1961), p. 240.

priestess, Pythia, who sat on a stool over a fissure (gap) in the earth, from which arose hypnotic (charming) vapours that put Pythia into a trance, and she was able to see dreams and visions, which enabled her to be Apollo's mouth piece (Col 1:18 was meant to address such beliefs).

It was also believed that world history was governed by fate, and that the fortunes of war could be swayed by the intervention of the gods.<sup>5</sup> This meant that every aspect of life, both physical and spiritual, was tied to the cosmic, spiritual world. Thus, one can read between the lines here in the purpose of the use of the phrase "image of God" by Paul. Paul's use of the phrase in a letter to an infant church, which was confronted with multiple cultures (Roman, Hellenistic, Jewish, and Christianity) that were often contradictory to each other one way, or had other unintended implications for the recipient church. There is a need to look into the world-renowned Greek philosophy, which was one of the core characteristics of those cultures, which significantly impacted and shaped the people's perceptions and worldview.

### **GREEK PHILOSOPHY**

The three classical philosophers, Socrates (470-399 BC), Plato (428-347 BC), and Aristotle (384-322 BC), influenced the whole of European civilisation, each in his own way. Socrates "claimed that he was guided by a divine inner voice, and that this 'conscience' told him what was right", meaning insights "lead to the right action", and he claimed that the ability to distinguish between right and wrong lies in people's reason, and not in society.<sup>6</sup> Platonism held that reality was divided into two regions: one region being the world of senses, about which we can only have approximate or incomplete knowledge, by using our five senses, and the other region being the world of ideas, about which we can have true knowledge, by using our ideas. Plato taught that "man is a dual creature, [with] a body that 'flows', is inseparably bound to the world of senses", and also has "an immortal soul

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<sup>5</sup> Jostein Gaarder, *Sophie's World: a Novel About the History of Philosophy*, Paulette Møller, tran., London UK: Phoenix, 1994, p. 45.

<sup>6</sup> Gaarder, *Sophie's World*, p. 59.

– and this soul is the realm of reason, and . . . can survey the world of ideas.”<sup>7</sup>

Aristotle, on the other hand, held that the highest degree of reality is what we “perceive” with our senses. He decided that reality consisted of various separate things that constitute a unity of form and substance, thus, for humans, upon death, the form or spirit ceases to exist the moment the body or substance die. Man is no longer man, the moment he dies.<sup>8</sup> In line with this belief were the Epicureans, who lived around the year 300 BC. The Epicureans “believed there was no life after death, because, when we die, the ‘soul atoms’ disperse in all directions”. They held that death did not concern them. As long as they existed, death was not there, but when death came, they no longer existed.<sup>9</sup> The response by people from this background to Paul’s message about the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ would probably have been disbelief.

In light of the above, the book of Colossians stands out as the most influential and thought-provoking book among the Pauline Epistles, because it is directed at opposing and nullifying an old and well-established philosophy. It dominated what could be described as the centre of the world, in terms of politics, religion, and civilisation. Bound in chains, and confined, Paul had nothing to do, or to think about, but to cleverly devise a time bomb. He carefully selected words that would transmit the force of his message with significant impact. He carefully constructed sentences and paragraphs that would, one day, blow up the big thinkers in the Mediterranean world, and cause them to lose hope in their renowned philosophies with the explosive arrival of the news about the true and final philosopher – Jesus Christ – with a true philosophy that had the answers to all of mankind’s unanswered questions. The image of the invisible God had come to declare to humanity that everything came through Him, and exists in Him, by Him, and for Him. Therefore, there was no need to think further, but to declare null and void the baseless philosophies, and surrender to the one true philosophy that Jesus Christ was the source of life.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 112.



## **IMAGE OF GOD IN THE BIBLE**

### **IMAGE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, AND ITS IMPLICATIONS**

The word “image” in Genesis refers to our ancestors, whom the Triune God created in the garden. The appearance of the word in Gen 1:26, 27, regarding the designation accorded by the Creator to the created being embraces a partial reflection of the triune God. This partial reflection of the triune God’s image, according to several scholars refers primarily to the power of dominion over creation. “It is thus understandable that the image of God in man has been equated with that which makes man unique among created things”, as specified in v. 26b, where the triune God specified His purpose in creating man in His own image was to have dominion over the other created things, both living and non-living. Hence, the image in human consisted of the power of dominion.<sup>10</sup> “Man is made in the image of God – in his headship over the earth around him, he is the ‘image and glory of God’ – but he was only a faint and fractional miniature, even in his first and best estate, and now it is sadly dimmed and effaced.”<sup>11</sup> C. F. D. Moule makes a comment regarding this, and says that this explicitly speaks about the limits, boundaries, weaknesses, and strengths of the image of God, and is set in contrast to the image of God in Christ Himself, which we will now explore in greater detail, in the light of the New Testament. It is to be noted that, whereas man is thought of as “made *in* (or *according to*) God’s image”, Christ is spoken of, not as “in” God’s image, but as being Himself God’s image (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15). In other words, man is further removed from the original than Christ is.<sup>12</sup>

### **IMAGE OF GOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

A good portion of the entire New Testament presents us with a clear identification of who Christ is, as the “image of God”, and His mission to

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<sup>10</sup> G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, Studies in Dogmatics, Jellema, Dirk W., tran., Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1962, p. 70.

<sup>11</sup> John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Colossians*, W. Young, ed., Birmingham AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 1855, p. 44.

<sup>12</sup> C. F. D. Moule, “New life in Colossians 3:1-17”, in *Review & Expositor* 70-4 (Fall 1973), p. 490.

make known to lost humanity His identity as the image of the unseen God, who was, and who is at work to restore the image in fallen humanity.

Firstly, the “image of God” was initially declared before Jesus’ birth by an angel in Matt 1:22-23, which is seen as the fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy in Is 7:14. “All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will be with child, and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’ – which means, ‘God with us’ ” (NIV). We also see, in Matt 26:63-64, where Jesus declared Himself to be the Christ, Son of God, in response to the high priest, who asked Him to confirm if He was the Christ, the Son of God.

Secondly, in John 1:1, we see Jesus, who is referred to as the Word, who was with God, and was God, and was with God in the beginning. “The Word became flesh, and made His dwelling among us” (John 1:14 NIV). Also, in John 14:8 NIV, we read about Philip asking Jesus for a glimpse of the Father, with a desire to see God, and Jesus replied, in v. 9, “Don’t you know Me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father.” H. Dermot McDonald explains this as follows: “He is so the image of God, as the Son is the image of His Father, who has a natural likeness to Him; and he who has seen Him has seen the Father.”<sup>13</sup> In Rev 3:14b NIV, we read, “These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation”. Similarly, the Colossian Christians read that Jesus “is the εἰκὼν (eikōn = image) of the invisible God” (Col 1:15). Both John 14:9 and Col 1:15 focus on Jesus Christ as truly God, coexisting with the Father from eternity past.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, like John, who had a similar message, Paul, was communicating to the Colossian church, by assuring them that Jesus Christ is God, is equal in essence to the Father, and is the Creator, and, therefore, is worthy of worship and admiration. However, “this was a concept difficult for polytheistic Greeks to accept, and it also shook the foundations of

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<sup>13</sup> H. Dermot McDonald, *Commentary on Colossians and Philemon*, Waco TX: Word Books, 1980, p. 46.

<sup>14</sup> H. Wayne House, “Doctrinal issues in Colossians, part 2: The Doctrine of Christ in Colossians”, in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 (April-June 1992), p. 181.

monotheistic Judaism. For a person to claim equality with the Yahweh of the Old Testament was considered blasphemy, which called for punishment by death. In the end, the Jews' refusal to acknowledge Christ as the Messiah, equal with God the Father, led to Jesus' death on the cross."<sup>15</sup>

### **IMAGE OF GOD IN COLOSSIANS: THEOLOGICAL MEANING**

The supremacy of Christ was vividly and creatively introduced by Paul in the Christological hymn in Col 1:15-20, using a single word explained the entire Christological hymn – “image” said it all! In addition, Paul also intended to justify and explain to the Colossians the merits and capabilities the image of the invisible God had to accomplish what He had done, as specified in vv. 12-14. The unqualified people were granted qualifications to share in God's inheritance, through redemption and forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness of sins was an act of God alone, as held by the Mediterranean world, and, thus, with such views, the Colossians would have had some difficulty in understanding the identity of Jesus. Mark 2:1-12 is a good example of this, as the teachers of the law thought that Jesus was blaspheming God, by forgiving the sins of the paralytic. Marianne Thompson makes a profound statement in support of this: “Of primary importance in this hymn, and for understanding God's actions in the world, is in an understanding of who Jesus is in relationship to God. He is described as ‘the image of the unseen God’.”<sup>16</sup> Here, Paul's strategy was to reveal the answer before asking the question that related to it, so that, every time he asked a question, it was a rhetorical question being asked, primarily to explain the answer. This strategy is unique, and it even goes against the natural laws of teaching and learning. No wonder, as referred to earlier, it was a language time bomb, intended to explode false notions, and reveal, in the minds of the new believers, the authenticity of the operation of God in physical form. John Eadie precisely states:

Christ, as Creator and Preserver, is the palpable image of God. In this aspect, it is not visibility of person that can be maintained, but the embodiment of attribute in visible result, as in Rom 1:20, where it is

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 192.

<sup>16</sup> Marianne Meye Thompson, *Colossians and Philemon*, The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005, p. 28.

said, “the invisible things” of the Creator are “clearly seen”. . . . His prophetic epithet was “Immanuel, God with us”. In His incarnate state, He brought God so near us as to place Him under the cognisance of our very senses – men saw, and heard, and handled Him – a speaking, acting, weeping, and suffering God.<sup>17</sup>

How marvellous, and how wonderful, to have God come to dwell among mankind, so that man could see and believe in Him, and eventually receive salvation! This was a stark contrast to the scenario in the OT, where man did not live after seeing God. Through Christ, a new story unfolded, a story worth retelling, of how sinful man saw God, and encountered life instead of death. The mystery was explained; the distant Being was made real; the higher, supernatural Being was made personal. The invisible Creator presented Himself visibly, and the spiritual presented Himself physically, all in the name of restoration, so that the image that was lost in the garden, at the expense of a piece of fruit, could be restored to its original identity, at the expense of the sole author of the image, who hung on the cross.

The value of the reconciled image is so precious, much more precious than in the garden; so precious that words cannot explain, because the author and destiny of life commissioned neither a proxy nor a substitute. He, rather, came humbly and lowly in human form to reclaim, through a tree, what was lost under a tree. A single piece of fruit cost God’s Son His own life. That’s far too good to be true, and so real to be good. John Eadie’s melodious words induce an incredible peace:

Perhaps, the Great God remains concealed forever in the unfathomable depths of His own essence, which, to every created vision, is so dazzling as to be “dark with excess of light”. There needs, therefore, a medium of representation, which must be His exact similitude. But where can this be found? Can any creature bear upon him the full impress of Divinity, and shine out in God’s stead to the universe without contraction of person, or diminution of splendour? Could the Infinite dwarf itself into the finite, or the Eternal shrink into a limited circle? May we not, therefore, anticipate a medium in

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<sup>17</sup> Eadie, *Colossians*, pp. 45-46.

harmony with the original? The lunar reflection is but a feeble resemblance of the solar glory. So that the image of God must be Divine as well as visible – must be ὁμοούσιος (homoousios) – of the same essence with the original. . . . Christ is the image of God – not σκιά (skia) – a shadowy or evanescent sketch, which cannot be caught or copied – but εἰκὼν (eikōn), a real and perfect likeness – no feature absent, none misplaced, and none impaired in fullness, or dimmed in lustre. The very counterpart of God He is.<sup>18</sup>

### **CAPABILITIES, AUTHORITIES, AND VICTORIES OF THE IMAGE OF GOD**

The Christological hymn of Col 1:15-23 is a detailed declaration and affirmation of the capabilities, authorities, and victories of the image of the invisible God. These are the characteristics that qualified and confirmed Jesus to be of the same essence with God, because only God alone can possess the capabilities, claim the authority, and proclaim the victories declared in Col 1:15-23. Thus, because He was divine, and an exact counterpart of God, He created everything visible and invisible (capability); He is head of the church (authority); the first-born among the dead (authority); He reconciled all things to Himself (victory); and made peace through His blood on the cross (victory). This was a powerful weapon Paul used, not only to address the Colossian philosophy, but also to declare totally wrong and condemn the blasphemy charge that was laid against Jesus, which led to His arrest and crucifixion. Hence, Paul declared to the unbelieving people of the Mediterranean world that Jesus was not just an ordinary person, or another prophet, as was claimed. Jostein Gaarder also adds to this by saying “one . . . central tenet was that Jesus was both God and man. He was not the ‘Son of God’, on the strength of His actions alone. He was God Himself”, and the message of the church was precisely that God became man, and further explains that Jesus was not a demigod (half-man, half-god). Belief in such demigods was quite widespread in the Greek and Hellenistic religions.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>19</sup> Gaarder, *Sophie's World*, p. 136.

## **THE IMPLICATIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE IMAGE OF GOD FOR CHRISTIANS TODAY**

### **KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST – A PREREQUISITE TO A HEALTHY SPIRITUALITY**

Let us start by quoting the saying, “every story has its own ending”. The echoes of Paul’s time bomb, which exploded in the Middle East nearly 2,000 years ago, firstly, to elevate the new Colossian Christians to new heights in their enriched knowledge of the supremacy of Christ, introduced as the “image of God”, and, secondly, to destroy the Graeco-Roman world’s unrealistic and baseless philosophies, can now be heard as loud and clear as it was first heard nearly two millennia ago. This is especially so in Melanesia, where we have origins and genealogy that was once bombarded by the old philosophy of animism, the story does not end on our side of the globe, but the legacy lives on and remains active, as if the explosion of Paul’s time bomb, which exploded two millennia ago, just exploded two days ago. This will be so, as long as the echoes of our fathers’ clinging to animism lingers, and it echoes in the hearts and minds of professed Christians, one way or another.

Nevertheless, we do not have a history that tells us that we have been created in the image of those spirits, which our forefathers lived for, in the old philosophy. On the contrary, we are so privileged to know and be reunited with Christ – the exact representation of the unseen God, who remained a mystery to our forefathers (although some distinctions were drawn), who, instead, had allegiances with the devil, who robbed us of our rights and privileges in the garden, and, in doing so, created enmity with God, in whose holy image we were created. The deities, with whom our forefathers “played marbles with, and spoke sweet candies to” were the very spirits that once destroyed our perfect relationship with God our Father. Thus, we should make it our aim not to get ourselves bogged down in this old philosophy, because Christ has won the victory for us on the cross, to release us from captivity.

By His cross, He releases His people, not only from the guilt of sin, but also from its hold over them. ‘He breaks the power of cancelled

sin', as the hymn-writer put it. Besides blotting out the record of their indebtedness, He has also conquered those forces, which used the record as a means of controlling them. "He stripped the principalities and powers, and made a public exhibition of them."<sup>20</sup>

There is a distinction between the metaphor "image of God" in man before the fall and the "image", which Christ, who is the Image of images, came to restore. On the one hand, the Genesis account of the original image of God in man, prior to the fall, was a state of ultimate perfection. While, on the other hand, the image, which was defaced by the fall, is the one, which Christ, who is the image, and ultimate and equal representation of God, came to restore, and His work is ongoing. As the image in Christians identifies itself with its source of origin, upon the exercise of faith in the accomplished work on the cross, and comes to conversion, it is imperative that Christians progressively, renounce the sinful nature that had dominion and control over the "image", and undergo a process of sanctification, characterised by the knowledge of God, through faith, until the original state of perfection is reached, during the second advent of Christ. This was the whole intention of Paul's letter to the Colossians. Thompson vividly explains this, "Here, Paul describes a process of renewal, 'according to the image of its Creator'. . . . Because Paul has earlier identified Christ as the 'image of the invisible God' (Col 1:15), Christ is the image of the renewed humanity."<sup>21</sup>

### **APPLICATION TO THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH**

So far, we have taken one of the two journeys, described by N. T. Wright as the historian's journey, into the abyss of time and space of some 2,000 years in search of the original meaning of the text, in the light of the culture of the church planted in the Lycus Valley. It is also appropriate and fitting to start the other journey, also termed by Wright as the theologian's or preacher's journey, to apply the lessons learnt to our lives today.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> F. F. Bruce, "Colossian Problems, part 4: Christ as Conqueror and Reconciler", in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141 (October-December 1984), p. 297.

<sup>21</sup> Thompson, *Colossians and Philemon*, p. 78.

<sup>22</sup> Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, p. 41.

In Melanesian culture, the first-born son of a chief is recognised as the heir of his father. Thus, the son has the right to represent his father in attending important social gatherings as a proxy, and receives the respect his father would have been accorded. However, the biblical teaching of Jesus being the image of His father even goes a step further, because Christ is not just a proxy, but God. Jesus, who is known in Christendom as the Son of God, can also be mistaken for an inferior deity, especially by Christians within Melanesia, who are influenced by our cultural understanding of the relationship between a father and son. Jesus, as equal with God – not a subordinate – needs to be emphasised and taught in the churches.

My conversion to faith in Jesus as “the Jesus I never understood before”, after a study of Colossians, when, in fact, I was supposed to have been fully aware of who is Christ, as a trained theologian, rings a bell loud and clear that there are uneducated Christians out there, who need to know the Christ of Colossians. Jesus Christ, as Emmanuel, and not proxy to God, needs to be adequately preached, because a thorough knowledge of Christ will draw Christians out of their spiritual poverty, and will eventually lead them to renounce any intermediary or supplementary beings they may have, as stand-by alternatives, for use when calamities strike.

Finally, the knowledge of Christ, as the image of the invisible God, and of His mission and accomplishment on the cross, leads to a surrendered life, as Col 3 demands from us, to put off the old self and put on the new self, which is renewal of the image that once was corrupted in the garden. As James Orr puts it, “To put on the new man is but to put on the image of God in Christ. To this we are predestinated that we should be conformed to the image of His Son.”<sup>23</sup>

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## READING THE NEW TESTAMENT AS PACIFICIANS LIVING IN THE LAST DAYS

**Ma'afu Palu**

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In this essay, I shall attempt to outline an approach, in which those of us living in the Pacific and elsewhere, in the post-cross, resurrection-ascension era, may come to appreciate the New Testament more fully.

### ESCHATOLOGY AT THE CENTRE

In most systematic theology textbooks, eschatology is the final topic to be treated. Theologians often construct their system of theology thematically. Thus, "creation" comes at the beginning, and all other significant theological themes would follow. Finally, at the end of their work, will be a section on "eschatology".<sup>1</sup> Peter F. Jensen has observed, however, that such systematic presentation of theology often results from adopting a philosophical framework.<sup>2</sup>

As serious bible believers, however, we must begin with the gospel message, and then seek to structure our theological reflection according to the conceptual framework provided therein. This implies that eschatology should become the governing principle in the construction of an evangelical

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<sup>1</sup> This is still true in recent attempts at writing a systematic theology from an evangelical perspective. See, for example, Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1983.

<sup>2</sup> See Peter F. Jensen, *At the Heart of the Universe: What Christians Believe*. Leicester UK: IVP, 1991. Also see his *The Revelation of God*, *Contours of Christian Theology*, Leicester UK: IVP, 2002.

systematic theology.<sup>3</sup> Eschatology is, indeed, at the centre of the gospel message preached by Jesus and His apostles in the New Testament. Jensen explains that,

[t]he gospel, by which we first come to know, God involves knowing about the last things, and an exposition, which reserves its treatment of them to the end, does not adequately represent the Bible, or what the Bible has to say about the other topics, including revelation. In seeing what God is planning, we gain perspective on who He is, and what He is doing to fulfil His ends. The doctrine of God is not complete until we see the whole of what He is achieving.<sup>4</sup>

Hence, for those who profess the centrality of the gospel message in their theological thinking, a consideration of a variety of theological issues, including how we may read the Bible, must be accomplished from the vantage point of the gospel.

### **THE BIBLICAL GOSPEL AND ESCHATOLOGY<sup>5</sup>**

The New Testament speaks about the gospel message in various terms. These include the “word of God”, “truth”, “our gospel” (2 Cor 4:1-6), and “gospel of the kingdom” (Matt 4:23). But what is the “gospel”? I wish to begin with the classical formulation of the gospel, as it was preached by Jesus.<sup>6</sup> According to Mark:

Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (Mark 1:14-15).

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<sup>3</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: on the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, New York NY: Harper & Row, 1967, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Jensen, *At the Heart of the Universe*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>5</sup> For a thorough discussion of the gospel message, and its content, see Jensen, *The Revelation of God*, chapter 1.

<sup>6</sup> See Barry G. Webb, “Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation”, in *Interpreting God’s Plan: Biblical Theology and the Pastor*, Explorations II, R. J. Gibson, ed., Carlisle UK: Paternoster Press, 1997, pp. 56-58. Webb argues that Mark 1:15 is the hermeneutical key for evangelical hermeneutics.

Several theological observations on the gospel can be made from this passage. Firstly, the gospel is the “good news of God”. That is, God is not only the “source” of the gospel of good news, but He is also the subject matter of the gospel message (Rom 1:3-4). To receive the gospel, therefore, is not a matter of human sophistication. Knowledge of the good news from God comes solely through the gracious revelation of God. Paul expresses this fact in the following way:

I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ (Gal 1:12).<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, Jesus declared that “the time has been fulfilled”. That is tantamount to saying that the “end of time has come”. As Barry G. Webb puts it, “Jesus’ preaching of the gospel is, first of all, an announcement that a particularly significant time has arrived, the time when the shell of expectation is filled up (fulfilled) with historical content”.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the occurrence of the term *πεπλήρωται* (*peplērōtai*) in the passive form points to God as the one who is bringing “time” into its fulfilment.<sup>9</sup> God’s promises, as they unfolded in the Old Testament, have now reached their fulfilment in the coming of Jesus. The first coming of Jesus is, therefore, the beginning of the end time – of “these last days”, according to the New Testament

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<sup>7</sup> This remark, of course, has to be squared with other passages, which mentioned that Paul “received” the gospel as “tradition” passed on to him from other apostolic agents (see 1 Cor 11:23; 15:1). It must be said that whether Paul received the gospel through his encounter on the Damascus Road [so Seyoon Kim, *The Origin of Paul’s Gospel*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1981; and Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer, *Paul Between Damascus and Antioch: The Unknown Years*, John Bowden, tran., Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997], or from apostolic traditions passed on to him from the Twelve, through his acquaintance with Peter (see Gal 2:1-2), Paul is justified in claiming that the “source” of the gospel he received was from the Lord.

<sup>8</sup> Webb, “Biblical Theology”, p. 58.

<sup>9</sup> Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, Word Biblical Commentary vol 34A, Dallas TX: Word Books, 1989, p. 43. See also Ma’afu Palu, *Jesus and Time: An Interpretation of Mark 1:15*, Library of New Testament Studies 468, London UK: T. & T. Clark International, 2012.

(Heb 1:1-2; cf. Acts 2:17). All that God had planned, since the creation of the world, is now brought to its ultimate realisation in Jesus. In that sense, the content of the gospel is eschatological, since it speaks about the “end time”, the last things. The gospel tells us that the end has arrived.<sup>10</sup>

Thirdly, Jesus speaks about the “kingdom of God”, saying that it “has come near”. Throughout the Old Testament, Israel had been looking ahead for the “kingdom of God”. Although the phrase, “kingdom of God” is not prominent in the Old Testament, the concept is surely present. The significance of the notion of the “kingdom of God”, and its pervasive influence, in the shape of the Old Testament narrative, has been discussed by John Bright, who showed how the narrative of the Old Testament, from its beginning to its end, is structured according to the theme of the “kingdom of God”.<sup>11</sup> Jesus’ declaration that the kingdom of God has come near reveals, therefore, that this has been the central hope of Israel in the Old Testament.<sup>12</sup>

What is more important, is the recognition that, for Jesus, the kingdom of God was primarily a future event. But, while it remains in the future, there is a sense in which it has already arrived, since Jesus claims that the time has come for its fulfilment (see also Luke 11:20). Thus, C. H. Dodd’s

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<sup>10</sup> E. Fuchs, “Christus das Ende der Geschichte”, in *Zur Frage nach dem historischen Jesus*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1960, pp. 83-86. See also the thesis of Wolfhart Pannenberg, who argues that the end has come *proleptically* in the resurrection of Jesus, which is the eschatological event *par excellence* in Wolfhart Pannenberg, ed., *Revelation as History*, New York NY: Macmillan, 1968, p. 134.

<sup>11</sup> John Bright, *The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept and Its Meaning for the Church*, Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1953. See also Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible*. Leicester UK: IVP, 1991; and Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom: A Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament*, Exeter UK: Paternoster Press, 1981. See, further, Martin J. Selman, “The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament”, in *Tyndale Bulletin* 40-2 (1989), pp. 161-183; D. Patrick, “The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament”, in *The Kingdom of God in Twentieth Century Interpretation*, Wendell Willis, ed., Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1987, pp. 67-89.

<sup>12</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, Exeter UK: Paternoster Press, 1986, p. x; Bruce Chilton, ed., *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, Philadelphia PA: Fortress Press, 1984, p. 1.

“realised” eschatology cannot be fully justified.<sup>13</sup> He seems to have misinterpreted Jesus’ announcement that “time has reached its fulfilment”, now, in the present time. But, neither can Albert Schweitzer be justified in his conviction about the futuristic character of the kingdom of God.<sup>14</sup>

Relative to Dodd, Schweitzer is mistaken in overlooking the present component of the kingdom in Jesus’ teachings. Relative to Schweitzer, Dodd overlooked the future element of the kingdom in the teaching of Jesus. Jesus was warning His audience about the kingdom of God, as a coming crisis, encouraging them to prepare for it. This coming crisis was an enduring factor in the early church’s evangelism that followed Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension.<sup>15</sup>

Since Jesus spoke of the kingdom as neither totally futuristic or entirely in the present. It is, therefore, a sound biblical judgment to speak of the existence of an “eschatological now-and-not-yet” of the kingdom of God.<sup>16</sup> In one sense, it can be seen as already here, but yet it is not here. Both dimensions are astonishingly present in the teachings of Jesus. The present is “marked by tension between what has come, and what is yet to come”.<sup>17</sup> While the kingdom is expected to come, we still live in the continuation of the “old age”, experiencing its pain, and encountering evil in the world. We cannot responsibly deny this tension in the believer’s experience without misunderstanding both history and the present moment.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*, London UK: Hodder & Stoughton, 1936. See also G. B. Caird, *The Apostolic Age*, London UK: Gerald Duckworth, 1955, pp. 37-38.

<sup>14</sup> See Albert Schweitzer, *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God: the Secret of Jesus’ Messiahship and Passion*, W. Lowrie, tran., London UK: A. & C. Black, 1914.

<sup>15</sup> On the eschatological dimensions of Jesus’ teaching on the kingdom of God, see my discussion in Palu, *Jesus and Time*, pp. 13-19.

<sup>16</sup> W. G. Kummel, *Promise and Fulfilment: The Eschatological Message of Jesus*, Studies in Biblical Theology 23, London UK: SCM Press, 1957. See also Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, London UK: SCM Press, 1951, p. 151. See, further, Palu, *Jesus and Time*, pp. 181-183.

<sup>17</sup> Jensen, *At the Heart of the Universe*, p. 24.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

### **THE ESCHATOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE GOSPEL**

On the basis of Jesus' proclamation of the gospel in Mark 1:15, a theological framework can be proposed, within which we may understand, not only the significance of Jesus' ministry, but also of the present time. We shall refer to this gospel theological framework as a "gospel eschatological framework", since it is a time frame derived from Jesus' proclamation that the end of time has arrived.

Mark apparently placed the ministry of Jesus in succession with John the Baptist (Mark 1:14). This may be a mere fact of history, but it is more than that. Mark is making a very important theological statement, in relation to the Old Testament. John the Baptist is presented in the Gospels as the forerunner of Jesus (Matt 3:1-12; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 1:11-17). In Mark's Gospel, John is presented in such a way that recalls the prophet Elijah.

This link with Elijah is suggested in the description of John's choice of clothing and diet. He "wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey" (Mark 1:6). In connection with the messianic expectation of the Old Testament, a number of important prophecies spring to the foreground. The outfit described therein was what Elijah himself had worn during his prophetic ministry in Israel (2 Kings 1:8).<sup>19</sup>

But why is this identification of John the Baptist with Elijah important? God had spoken through the prophet Malachi, at the return of the Babylonian exile, that He Himself would come to Israel in judgment in the near future. Israel would know when that great event was just about to happen, because He would send His "messenger" before Him to "prepare the way" (Mal 3:1, also quoted in Mark 1:2-3). God's "messenger" was to be Elijah the prophet:

See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their

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<sup>19</sup> John must have followed an old prophetic practice of embodying in his own life and activities the "word" of God for his own generation (see, e.g., Ezek 4, 5). On John the Baptist as Elijah coming first, see my discussion in Palu, *Jesus and Time*, pp. 180-181.

children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else, I will come and strike the land with a curse (Mal 4:5-6 NIV).

Thus, in the 1st century, there seems to have been a genuine expectation among the Jews that the prophet Elijah would come in an extraordinary manner to “prepare the way” for the Lord. This is apparent from the inquiry made by the “Jews of Jerusalem” of John the Baptist, at the prime of his ministry. They asked him then whether he was “Elijah”, or the “prophet” (John 1:21).

Through these inquiries, we can see the Jewish messianic expectation, current at the time of Jesus. The expectation of a “prophet” recalls Moses’ prediction, while Israel was still in the wilderness, about God raising up a “prophet” like Him, through whom the word of God will be given to Israel (Deut 18:15-20). But the question about Elijah indicates that the coming of the “great and dreadful day of the Lord”, spoken through the prophet Malachi, also featured prominently in what the Jews of Jesus’ day would have regarded as the “signs of the time”.

John’s denial that he was the “Elijah to come” indicates that he might have underestimated the significance of his own ministry, with respect to the coming of Jesus (John 1:21). Even though he was absolutely certain that Jesus was the one “greater” than himself, who will be the Spirit baptiser, he was not certain whether Jesus was the Messiah (Matt 11:4-5). This must not be regarded as John’s fault, because he was imprisoned before the beginning of the ministry of Jesus (Matt 4:11; Mark 1:14). Thus, he failed to be an eyewitness of the fulfilment of what the scriptures said would be the prerogatives of the coming Messiah (Matt 11:4-5; cf. Is 35:3-7).

Jesus, however, pointed to John as the “Elijah to come” (Matt 11:14-15). In other words, Jesus’ identification of John with Elijah indicated that the “day of the Lord” has been inaugurated with His own coming. In accordance with Malachi’s prophecy, the day of the Lord is meant to be the day in which the Lord will intervene in the affairs of this world, to bring a purifying judgment upon His own people, in order to make them more pleasing to Him (Mal 3:1-5).



Although Jesus acknowledges that the judgment of this world has arrived, when He was lifted up on the cross (John 12:30-33), He, however, associated His own earthly ministry with that of the suffering Servant (Is 53; cf. Mark 10:45; Luke 4:16-21). In that sense, His death was God's judgment upon this world for sins. However, Jesus also spoke of a future day of judgment, as a day of resurrection – the resurrection of the righteous, and the resurrection of the wicked (John 5:28-29) – which can be identified with the “resurrection on the last day”, according to Jewish belief (cf. John 11:24; Luke 14:14; John 6:39).<sup>20</sup>

These foregoing observations are sufficient to provide the structure of the eschatological framework of the gospel. Even though the end has already arrived with Jesus, the end is also yet to come, since the consummation of the kingdom of God remains a future event. The present time, then, is to be seen as a time of double experience, in the life of those who have believed in Jesus – between knowing that they have, indeed, shared in the kingdom's blessings, through faith in Christ (see Col 1:12-14), and are still having to go through the difficulties of this earthly existence, where the evil one is having a final assault on the Lord of the universe, whom God has raised from the dead, and His people (see Rev 12:11-12).

The evil one, however, has been decisively defeated upon the cross (see Col 2:13-15, cf. John 12:30-32), and Jesus has been exalted as the Lord and Christ of the universe (Acts 2:33-36). He is now seated at the right hand of the Father, waiting for the Father's appointed time, in which the judgment of this world will come about concretely. On that day, His enemies will be made His “footstool” (Ps 110:1-2; Acts 2:36). We can represent all this in a diagram presentation like this:

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<sup>20</sup> See also the discussion of the Jewish expectation of the last day in Palu, *Jesus and Time*, pp. 183-186.

*Eschatological framework of the gospel of Jesus (Mark 1:14-15)*

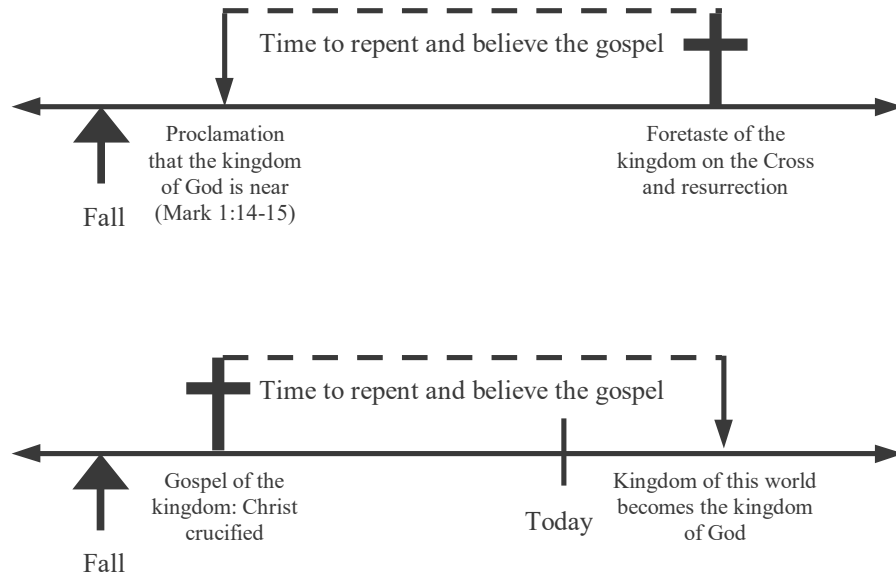


Figure 1. Eschatological framework of the gospel from (Mark 1:14-15).

In keeping with the eschatological framework, which we have outlined from the gospel message in Mark 1:15, we are now living in the period, to which the New Testament refers as the “last days” (Acts 2:17; Heb 1:1-2).<sup>21</sup> This is the interim period between the first coming of Jesus and His return.

### JESUS’ MISSION AND THE CROSS

Since Jesus came proclaiming the coming-near of the kingdom of God, it appears that the Old Testament was looking forward to its coming. In one sense, all the prophecies in the Old Testament may be classified as looking forward to the “day of the Lord”; the day in which God will intervene in the affairs of this world, to save His own people, and to restore Israel as the

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Carl E. Braaten *The Future of God: The Revolutionary Dynamics of Hope*, New York NY: Harper & Row, 1969, pp. 18, 24. See also the discussion in Charles M. Horne, “Eschatology: The Controlling Thematic in Theology”, in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 13-1 (Winter 1970), pp. 53-63, esp. pp. 56-58.

centre of the world (cf. Acts 1:6-7). The writers of the New Testament point unanimously in the direction that God has fulfilled all His promises in the first coming of Jesus. One important aspect of that fulfilment can be seen in Jesus, as the Good Shepherd of God's flock, Israel, to whom the prophets were looking forward (Ezek 34; Is 40:10-11). As the Good Shepherd, His earthly ministry was restricted only to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 15:24). Gentiles were not excluded during the earthly ministry of Jesus, but, like the Syro-Phoenician woman, they could come to Jesus by their own initiative.

As the Good Shepherd of Israel, Jesus came to lay down His own life for the lost sheep of Israel (John 10:10). His mission was ultimately to die on the cross, in order to save His people from their sins (Matt 1:21). In fact, as D. A. Carson observes, an important contribution of the canonical Gospels to the biblical storyline is that "they unite in telling the story of Jesus, so that the rush of the narrative is towards the cross".<sup>22</sup> As the Messiah of Israel, the salvation of His own people was His priority. But, on the cross, the full scope of Jesus' mission was revealed. On the cross, it was shown that, even though his earthly ministry was restricted to the lost sheep of Israel, the Gentiles were always in view. As Paul puts it:

For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs, so that the Gentiles may glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name" (Rom 15:8-9 NIV).

And again,

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree" – so that, in Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith (Gal 3:13-14 ESV).

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<sup>22</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1996, p. 263.

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus also indicated that He has “other sheep that are not of this sheep pen”, but which He must gather (John 10:10, 14-15). These “other sheep”, that He must also bring in, were included upon the cross. According to Paul, upon the cross of Jesus, the Gentiles, who once were far away, were drawn near. Surprisingly, however, even the Jews, who were supposed to be “near”, were also drawn near, together with the Gentiles, to the sphere of God’s blessings, by means of the blood of Jesus Christ (Eph 2:11-21).

### **GOSPELS AND EPISTLES WITHIN THE ESCHATOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE BIBLE**

The cross of Jesus indicates how the Gospels and the epistles are related, in the eschatological framework of the gospel message Jesus proclaimed in Mark 1:15. The Gospels narrate the earthly ministry of Jesus, prior to the cross. Since the ultimate purpose of Jesus’ mission is to die on the cross, the Gospels occupy a similar position to that of the Old Testament, in the sense that they describe events leading up to the cross. The Gospels’ narration of Jesus, as going ultimately to the cross, looks back to the Old Testament, in order to identify Jesus with Israel’s hope of restoration. In Jesus’ ministry, as we have seen in the previous section, God’s promises, in the Old Testament, find their literal fulfilment. The Old Testament, in a sense, indicates the path, which the Messiah is to follow, and upon which He could possibly be identified.

Diagrammatically, the place of the Gospels in the eschatological drama of the whole Bible may be represented as follows:

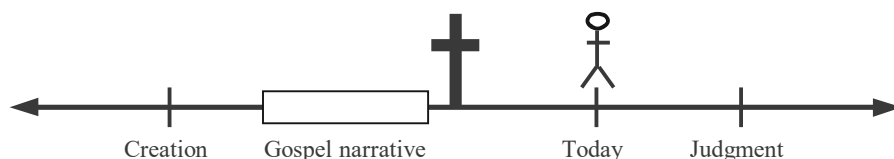


Figure 2. The Gospels in the eschatological framework of the gospel.

### APPLICATION TO READING THE GOSPELS

In the light of the position of the Gospels in the overarching eschatological framework derived from Jesus' gospel proclamation in Mark 1:15, three steps can be determined, in which the Gospel narratives' relevance to our contemporary situation is to be discerned.

#### STEP 1: THE CONTENT OF THE PASSAGE

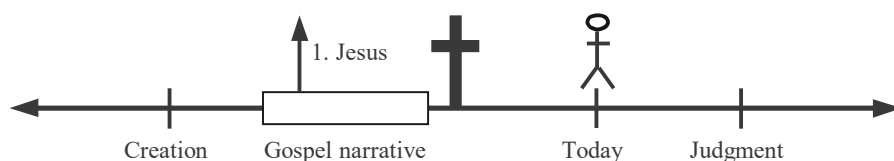


Figure 3. Question: What is Jesus saying or doing in this passage?

In this step, the reader's concern is to read and re-read the gospel, in order to understand what Jesus is saying or doing in a given passage. Here, textual criticism may be employed, in order to establish the original text. But, since the gospel is the story of Jesus, it is important to focus on what Jesus is saying or doing in the passage, with which one is dealing.

#### STEP 2: THE FULFILMENT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE GOSPEL PASSAGE

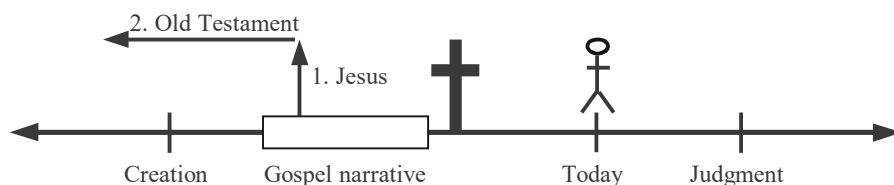


Figure 4. Question: What aspect(s) of the Old Testament is/are fulfilled in this passage?

As mentioned above, it is from the Old Testament that we can possibly "feel" the shape of the kind of Messiah that Jesus was going to be. Thus, we may never fully understand the ministry of Jesus in the Gospels without resorting to its Old Testament background. The gospel is the story of Jesus' ministry, climaxing in His death for our sins, and His resurrection, according

to the scriptures (1 Cor 15:3-4). He has been exalted to the highest heaven, to sit at the right hand of God, from whence He shall shortly return to judge the living and the dead (Acts 2:33-36).

This observation is especially important for serious Bible believers, because,

in affirming that Jesus is the Messiah, the New Testament affirmed that all that the Old Testament faith had longed for, and pointed to, has been realised in Him. He is the fulfilment of all that the law community had tried to do, and all that prophetic hope had envisioned.<sup>23</sup>

Hence, a responsible reading of the Gospels must hark back to the Old Testament, to find the terms and categories, within which we may correctly understand the ministry of Jesus, as described in the New Testament. This step can be easily accomplished, with the assistance of computerised cross-reference Bibles, or an available study Bible.

### STEP 3: APPLYING THE PASSAGE

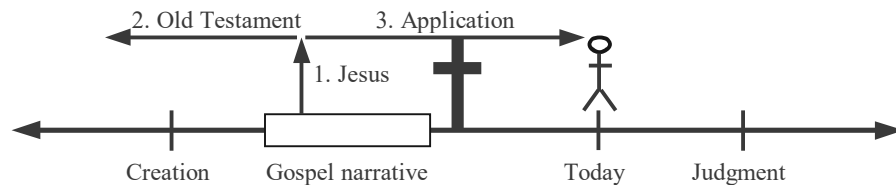


Figure 5. Question: How can this passage be applied to us in the light of the cross of Christ?

As aforementioned, the ministry of Jesus, as foreshadowed in the Old Testament, and described in the Gospels, is ultimately fulfilled on the cross. Historically speaking then, the events, narrated in the Gospels, must be read with the view that they find their meaning ultimately on the cross of Jesus. Even Jesus' healing miracles point to His taking upon Himself our "infirmities, and bore our diseases" upon the cross (Matt 8:17). His exorcisms, moreover, foreshadow the ultimate defeat of the "ruler of this

<sup>23</sup> Bright, *Kingdom of God*, pp. 190-191.

world” on the cross (John 12:31). Further, His miracles demonstrate the power that defeats sin and death upon the cross. It is this message of the cross, which has given us believers the hope of eternal life (1 Cor 1:18; 15:1-4). Moreover, it is this message that must be proclaimed, whenever the Gospels are preached from the pulpit.

#### **APPLICATION TO THE EPISTLES**

According to the eschatological framework, delineated on the basis of Jesus’ gospel proclamation in Mark 1:15, the New Testament letters, or the epistles, find their rightful place at the post-cross, post-resurrection ministry of the New Testament church. Even though, historically, they were written before the Gospels, the letters reflect how the cross of Christ becomes God’s gracious invitation to Jews and Gentiles to join His family, and enjoy the blessings promised to Israel through Abraham.

As a body of literature, the epistles demonstrate how the post-resurrection great commission of Jesus to his disciples has been fulfilled (Matt 28:19-20). In that sense, the epistles consistently presuppose the cross and the resurrection of Jesus as their point of reference. They are written to exhort believers who have accepted the gospel message, through the evangelism that resulted from Jesus’ death and resurrection. The believer’s acceptance of the gospel proclamation is the appropriation of the forgiveness of sins, as well as the seal of the Holy Spirit, “who is a deposit, guaranteeing our inheritance, until the redemption of those who are God’s possession – to the praise of His glory” (Eph 1:14).

The role of the Spirit affirms the future dimension of salvation, namely, “the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:23), or the reception of “heavenly bodies”, in the general resurrection (1 Cor 15:40). This hope for the resurrection of our bodies coincides with the coming of the kingdom of God publicly (1 Cor 15:20-28). When believers see Christ in His return, they “will appear with Him in glory” (Col 3:4). The Christian hope is captured in the conviction that “we shall be like Him” (1 John 3:2), which, indeed, is the fulfilment of the desire of humanity that results in the entrance of sin. Adam and Even disobeyed God, because the serpent promised that they will be like God (Gen 3:5).

Since believers have been justified freely, through the blood of Jesus Christ, there is confidence and assurance that they will be saved from the judgment that is to come (Rom 5:8-9). For believers, there is only the glorious hope of a redeemed body, a spiritual, resurrected body (1 Cor 15:51-54). This is not so for unbelievers. For them, there is no true hope for the future. Rather, there is only the fearful expectation of “judgment, and of raging fire, that will consume the enemies of God” (Heb 10:27; 2 Thess 1:6-10).

Thus, the underlying rationale for writing the epistles is the near expectation of the day of judgment (cf. 1 Thess 5:1; 2 Cor 5:10; Heb 10:24-25). The epistles are the apostolic means of exhorting, by their preaching, those, who have accepted the gospel of the Lord Jesus, to remain faithful, and to stand firm in the gospel, which they have received, for it is only through that gospel that they may be saved (1 Cor 15:2).

Moreover, the epistles are the apostolic means of guaranteeing that, in their absence (either through geographical distance or death), the church of God will remain faithful to the apostolic gospel message they had preached, until the day of judgment, when the glorious hope, presented in the gospel, will be realised in them. In that sense, the epistles are the proper “apostolic succession” of the church of God. For, through them, the apostles continue to speak the living word of God to believers, even today.<sup>24</sup>

As a matter of fact, the epistles give us the confirmation of the apostolic conviction that we do not start the Christian life with the gospel, and then progress to something more spiritually advanced. This is the error of the Galatians, and the Colossian believers, in the early church. The Galatian believers thought that we could supplement the gospel message with “works of the law”. For Paul and the apostles, however, to add something like the Law to the gospel is to render the gospel insufficient as God’s gracious means of saving us from this evil age (Gal 1:1-9).

The Colossians, on the other hand, not only resorted to religious laws and rituals to supplement their faith in Christ Jesus as Lord, but also to a higher

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<sup>24</sup> The same remark can, of course, be made about the Gospels. See John 20:30-31 and Luke 1:1-4.



form of mystical experience, which seems to have involved visions and dreams, and probably asceticism, in order to be fully Christians (cf. Col 2:23). Again, Paul reminded them that, as believers, they have been given “fullness in Christ” (Col 2:9). Believers do not begin as Christians with receiving Christ Jesus as Lord, and then advance to something more spiritual, even to a baptism in the Spirit as a second blessing.

The gospel message is sufficient, on its own terms, for the salvation of believers. There is no need for it to be supplemented, or complemented, by anything, however useful it may be to the experience of the believer. In fact, to supplement or complement the gospel message with something else is to preach “another Jesus” (2 Cor 11:4); or “another gospel” (Gal 1:9), which, in effect, will destine the preacher to condemnation on the day of judgment. In the light of the coming day of judgment, Paul’s exhortation to the Colossian believers may also apply for us:

So then, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith *as you were taught*, and overflowing with thankfulness (Col 2:6-7, italics added).

This implies that the New Testament epistles are firmly grounded on the cross, and the resurrection of Jesus, as their point of reference. They look back to the cross, as the fundamental guiding ethical principle for Christian living, in the interim period between the first coming and Jesus’ return.

Although the epistles were specifically written to address certain pastoral situations, with which the early church was confronted, it seemed that the underlying conviction of the apostles was that these situations appear to emerge from a fundamental misunderstanding of the gospel message. Thus, it was almost always the case that Paul would begin an epistle with an exposition of the gospel message, which he has preached, and which believers had received (e.g., Eph 1-3), prior to addressing the specific pastoral problems, with which the respective churches were struggling (e.g., Eph 4-6). In that sense, the majority of Paul’s letters could be structured

under two headings: the “gospel message”, and “how to live in the light of the gospel message”.

There are exceptions, of course,<sup>25</sup> but this is the most basic way in which Paul addresses the problems that the New Testament churches encountered in their historical setting in the 1st century AD. Not surprisingly, even in the present situation, it is still the case that church problems are, all too often, the result of a fundamental misunderstanding of the gospel message of Christ crucified.

We can represent the position of the New Testament epistles in the eschatological framework derived from Jesus’ gospel proclamation in Mark 1:15 as follows:

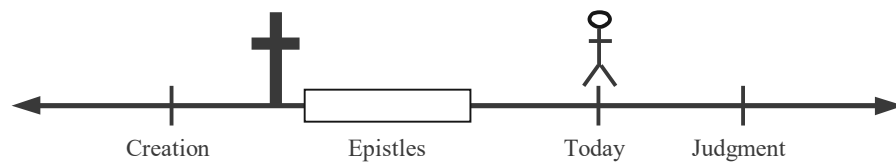


Figure 6. The Epistles in the eschatological framework of the gospel.

### **APPLICATION TO THE INTERPRETATION OF THE EPISTLES**

The position of the New Testament epistles, in relation to the eschatological framework of Jesus’ gospel proclamation, points to three steps for reading the epistles.

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<sup>25</sup> The letter to the Galatians begins, for example, with the strong rebuke of the believers for abandoning the true gospel in place of another gospel, which, according to Paul, is no gospel at all (Gal 1:6-7).

### FIRST STEP: THE EPISTLE'S ENCOURAGEMENT TO BELIEVERS IN THE PRESENT TIME

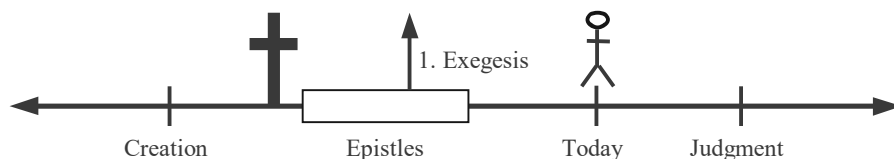


Figure 7. How does this passage encourage believers to godly living today?

As mentioned above, the epistles are the apostolic means for making sure that the church of God is encouraged towards godly living, even in their absence (whether through geographical distance or death). Thus, the words of the apostle to those, who were living there and then, are also the words for us believers living today. We live in the same eschatological time frame, in which they lived with the cross, as the basis of their salvation, and the impending judgment, as the consummation of their hope of glory. God's word is a living word. We may be separated culturally and historically from the Ephesian believers, but, since we belong to the same eschatological frame of time, the word of God, that encouraged them towards godly living in the present, is also the word of God to us (cf. 1 Cor 10:11; Rom 15:4).

### SECOND STEP: CROSS-BASIS OF THE EPISTLES' EXHORTATIONS

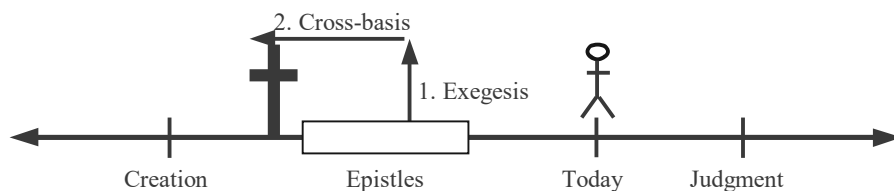


Figure 8. In what sense is the encouragement, given in this passage, based on the cross of Christ?

The cross may not be explicitly mentioned in the passage one is dealing with. But, as we have mentioned above, throughout the epistles, the cross is constantly presupposed, because the epistles are written to those who have received Christ Jesus as Lord, through accepting the gospel (Col 2:6-7; Eph 1:13-14). The intention is for them to hold fast to the gospel of Christ

crucified, which they have received, and upon which they are being saved (1 Cor 15:3-4).

### THIRD STEP: LOOKING FORWARD TO THE COMING JUDGMENT DAY

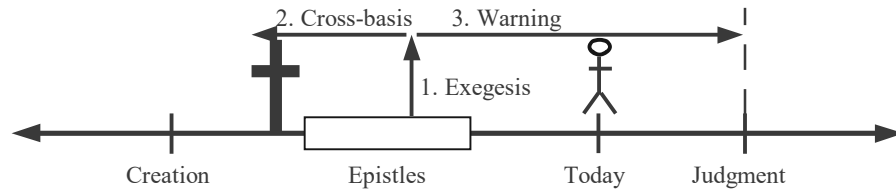


Figure 9. How important is this encouragement, as we look forward to the judgment day.

Again, the judgment, and the future hope, of the believer may not be explicitly mentioned in the passage, but, as we have argued, the epistles seek to exhort believers towards godly living in the present time, in view of the judgment to come (e.g., Heb 10:24-25; 2 Tim 4:1). Once judgment is abolished from one's personal theological system, we may try, as hard as we may, to give a proper justification for moral living in the present time, but we will find none that is logically appealing.

### CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

In this paper, we have outlined an eschatological time frame, on the basis of Jesus' gospel proclamation in Mark 1:15, within which the Gospels and the epistles of the New Testament are to be read as God's word for the contemporary situation. We have argued that the Gospels should be read in the light of the observation that Jesus' earthly ministry finds its ultimate meaning and fulfilment upon the cross. As those living after the cross and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, we must learn to appreciate the Gospels as the re-telling of the power of Jesus' death and resurrection in the form of a story. Hence, the ministry of Jesus does not primarily give us examples to imitate. Rather, the earthly ministry of Jesus indicates the extent of His power, which is at work in those of us who have truly received the gospel message about Him.

Within the gospel eschatological framework, we have also seen that the epistles, even though written before the Gospels, are addressing the situation of believers after the cross and resurrection of Jesus, by reminding believers of the gospel they had received, and upon which they should continue to stand until the day of judgment. In that sense, the epistles consistently presuppose the cross, and encourage believers to live their lives in the light of the cross, looking forward to being rescued from God's wrath when Jesus returns (cf. 1 Thess 1:9-10; Phil 3:20-21).

In relation to the Gospels, the epistles can be more immediately applied to us today, since they address people like us, living in the "last days", just as we are. Even though they were written to address specific situations in the early church, the general principles of godly living, in view of the wrath to come, conveyed therein, are undoubtedly applicable to us in the contemporary situation still waiting for the day of judgment.

The implications for theological contextualisation of the approaches for reading the Gospels and the epistles, set forth in this paper are significant. As Pacifician believers, we must never be discouraged from applying the New Testament writings to our lives today, by the insistence that biblical truths ought to be clothed in cultural outfits first. As people living in the "last days", we belong to similar situations as those which the Gospels and the epistles were addressing. True, they were written to address a particular historical time and place, catering for different pastoral needs that might have emerged from the earliest community of believers.

However, since they were addressing believers, living in the aftermath of the cross and resurrection of Jesus, and who were looking forward to His return to rescue them from God's wrath, just as we are today, the words to them can also become God's word to us today, in our present situation here in the Pacific. The eschatological framework of the gospel, within which we live, therefore, transcends our cultural, historical, and even theological differences with believers in the 1st century, since we, too, were saved by receiving Christ Jesus as Lord, and are awaiting His glorious return, for the transformation of our lowly bodies into the likeness of His glory.

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# **TOWARDS AN ECOTHEOLOGY FOR PNG – RELATING BIBLICAL ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP WITH THE MELANESIAN CULTURAL CONCEPT OF INSEPARABILITY AND INTERRELATEDNESS OF HUMANKIND AND NATURE**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Ecotheology is a significant issue, which was practised during the “roots” period (1796-1880) and “shoots” period (1840-1900) in the South Pacific, but, during those times, it was an unheard-of term.<sup>1</sup> When the first missionaries entered the Pacific in the 1830s, they showed great interest in ethnography and anthropology. However, secular scientists now dominate environmental studies, leaving God out of the picture.

In recent times, Pacific theologians have shown great interest in the environment, thus contextualising the issue. During the pioneer period, European missionaries studied plants, animals, and the environment, in order

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<sup>1</sup> This article uses three terms to define time periods in the spread of the gospel in the South Pacific: roots, shoots, and fruit. See pp. 52ff. for a more detailed history of the “roots” and “shoots” period.



to understand the cultures of the people they were serving.<sup>2</sup> For example, John Williams described the vegetation of the Hervey Islands in the Cook Islands, and gave descriptive information of its rocks, plants, and foliage.<sup>3</sup>

Before continuing, it will be good to know the definition of ecotheology, to help us understand the issue that we will be looking at in this paper. “Ecotheology” refers to the “theological discourse that highlights the whole household of creation, especially the world of nature as an interrelated system”.<sup>4</sup> The term “ecotheology” came into existence to deal with critics, who blamed Christianity for manipulating and exploiting nature.<sup>5</sup>

### **PURPOSE**

This paper aims to explore the environmental stewardship in traditional Papua New Guinea (PNG) cultures, and to find similarities in the Bible. Secondly, this paper will search for biblical, environmental stewardship, to develop a contextual theology for PNG, through effective contextualisation. Such effective contextualisation will emerge from the intra-textualisation method,<sup>6</sup> and the “theologising with concept” method.<sup>7</sup> This is because people do not like to see culture controlling the text. However, culture will only provide the context, but will allow the text to guide the contextualisation process. The “intra-textualisation” method refers to using the Bible as the starting point in theologising. The “theologising with concept” method refers to using local ideas, which align with biblical concepts. Palu makes the point that, to use culture, as the starting point in

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<sup>2</sup> Williams, John, *Missionary Enterprises in the South Sea Islands*, Philadelphia PA: Presbyterian Board of Publishing, 1888, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Williams, *Missionary Enterprises*, p. 24. Also refer to John M Hitchen, “Training ‘Tamate’: Formation of the 19th-Century Missionary Worldview: the Case of James Chalmers”, PhD dissertation, Aberdeen UK: University of Aberdeen, 1984, pp. 89-92.

<sup>4</sup> “Ecotheology”, <http://www.enotes.com/Ecotheology-reference/Ecotheology>, accessed March 7, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1. Such critics were blaming Christians, when referring to Gen 1:28. Lynn White Jr, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crises”, in *Science* 155-3767 (March 10, 1967), pp. 1203-1207, will give more background information.

<sup>6</sup> Ma’afu Palu, “Pacific Theology”, in *Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II 28 (2002), p. 40.

<sup>7</sup> Paulo Koria, “Moving Towards a Pacific Theology: Theologising with Concepts”, in *Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II 22 (1999), p. 3.

contextualisation will only lead to domesticated theology.<sup>8</sup> This research will help Christians to love God's creation, because of their love for God. Loving God's world is in line with the Cape Town Commitment, but such love is not "mere sentimental affection for nature, or pantheistic worship of nature".<sup>9</sup> The Cape Town Commitment states that:

We love the world of God's creation. This love is not mere sentimental affection for nature (which the Bible nowhere commands); still less is pantheistic worship of nature (which the Bible expressly forbids). Rather it is the logical outworking of our love for God, by caring for what belongs to Him. "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." The earth is the property of the God we claim to love and obey. We care for the earth, most simply because it belongs to the One whom we call Lord.<sup>10</sup>

A better understanding of biblical, environmental stewardship values, which align with PNG traditional cultures, will help believers to care for God's creation. This paper will also motivate PNG believers to see creation care as a holistic ministry, and not as a separate field of study. Discoveries from this research will help PNG people to understand their interrelatedness to the environment, thus deepening their biblical understanding of caring for the earth. When PNG Christians know the holistic issues surrounding the care of environment, the cultural concepts relating to environmental stewardship, and the biblical mandate for humans to care for the earth, they will see the importance of caring for the earth.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following questions will set the stage in dealing with the issues presented in this paper. Firstly, what does the Bible say about environmental stewardship? This question will help readers to see the importance of environmental stewardship, from a biblical perspective. Secondly, what were traditional PNG attitudes to environmental

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<sup>8</sup> Palu, "Pacific Theology", p. 39.

<sup>9</sup> "For the Lord We Love: The Cape Town Confession of Faith: part 1", in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 35-2 (April 2011), p. 64.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

stewardship? Thirdly, which cultural practices of environmental stewardship relate to scriptural stewardship practices? Biblical understanding is crucial to help in critically analysing environmental issues holistically. Finally, how can PNG Christians actively participate in environmental stewardship? This question will help churches become holistically involved in environmental issues, rather than just watching developers destroying the environment.

In addition, these questions can create awareness regarding Melanesian cultural concepts of inseparability and interrelatedness of humankind and nature. Furthermore, these questions will help believers in PNG to value the importance of biblical, environmental stewardship. They can revive good cultural environmental stewardship, and seek the Bible for solutions to problems affecting the environment.

### **TRADITIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP**

According to Ole, “the Melanesian concept of creation [stems from the] people’s relationship to the earth and environment, with all their contents, visible and invisible”.<sup>11</sup> For Melanesians, “this understanding of [land and environment] being inseparably interrelated and interdependent to nature gives Melanesians a sense of reverence and care for creation”.<sup>12</sup> Such thoughts gives Papua New Guineans hope that they have something to contribute from their own culture towards environmental stewardship.

### **TABOOS AND TOTEMISM**

One way, in which PNG people conserved the environment, was through the laws handed down from their ancestors in relation to taboos and totemism. For example, the Northern Massim people of Milne Bay did not eat certain birds, which were totems of their clans.<sup>13</sup> They believed that, if somebody ate their totem birds, they would have swollen stomachs.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, the

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<sup>11</sup> Ronnie Tom Ole, “Making Sense of the Oneness of Life: A Melanesian Christian View on Creation, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 6-2 (1990), p. 34.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Gabriel Seligman, *The Melanesians of British New Guinea*, Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1910, p. 680.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 688.

Gawa people of Milne Bay gave their totem birds to other people to eat if they caught them.<sup>15</sup> They also respected their totemic plants, and avoided injuring them.

For celebrations, the Iwa people of Milne Bay Province did not wear feathers of the birds of their totem.<sup>16</sup> The Osiwasio tribes in Milne Bay did not eat wild pigs, but sold them to the people of Kiriwina.<sup>17</sup> Many tribes in PNG did not eat plants or animals that were symbols, or totems, of their clans. By adhering to their tribal laws and obligations, they were practising their traditional environmental stewardship. Without the traditional laws regarding totems, the people could deplete the animals and plants.

There were taboos that helped in protecting animals and plants as well. In Hula village, Central Province, young women, who were tattooed, did not eat octopus in the olden days. The people believed that, when the women ate octopus, the lemon thorn used in tattooing would stick to their skins.<sup>18</sup> There were other taboos relating to mourning, feasting, agriculture, and other customary laws as well as traditional protocols regarding deaths, births, and marriage. Cliff Bird sees the importance of these unwritten and non-textual sources as they convey meaningful information on the values and practices of traditional environmental stewardship.<sup>19</sup> This is so true in the Pacific and PNG, because the people come from an oral society, and they preserved their thoughts and beliefs through oral traditions.

### ***Food Restrictions***

While the taboos and totems were helpful in protecting the environment, the people could suffer from malnutrition or other disease by not eating enough

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 680.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 688.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> The author's late maternal grandmother, Kali Ani (nee Papuka), of Hula village, Central Province, told him about this taboo.

<sup>19</sup> Cliff Bird, "Hermeneutics of Ecology and its Relationship to the Identity of the Oikos in Oceania", in *Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II 46 (2011), p. 22, quoting from Paul Van Tongeren, "The Relationship of Narrativity and Hermeneutics to an Adequate Practical Ethic", in *Ethical Perspectives* 1-2 (June 1994), pp. 60-67, citing various works of Paul Ricoeur listed in the Bibliography at Ibid., pp. 70-71.

protein. This was especially true when it came to mourning the death of a loved one. Close relatives stopped eating the favourite food of the deceased. Such restrictions ended after the mortuary feast was held to put a headstone over the grave.<sup>20</sup> Food restrictions for mourning can last for six months or a year. It depends on the relatives of the deceased having enough food, garden produce, and money to hold the feast. Nowadays, such practices are slowly changing, because of modernisation, and all of the hard work and money involved.

### **PROTECTING PLANTS AND ANIMALS**

The author's maternal grandfather told him to throw back into the sea, tiny fish caught in the net. People use tiny dead fish or crabs and other marine creatures for bait. Anglers, who caught small fish on their fishing lines, also threw them back into the sea. The people only kept fish and other marine products that were fit for consumption.<sup>21</sup> These practices maintained traditional conservation methods, which allowed fish and other marine products to multiply for future consumption.

In the Highlands, when women dig sweet potatoes (*kaukau*), they do not dig up everything. They leave the small *kaukau* in the soil, and only harvest the big ones to cook for their families. The women practised what they had learnt from their ancestors, so that they would always have enough food to feed their families. These cultural values, in protecting plants and animals, have helped our people to maintain environmental stewardship in their daily lives.

### **TRADITIONAL BELIEF SYSTEM**

Apart from cultural practices, there are traditional concepts preserved in the beliefs of the people. For example, the Binandere people believed that humans, and all other things, both animate and inanimate, have similar

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<sup>20</sup> The Hood Bay people in Central Province practice such restrictions during mourning. The author's late mother had sores on her body, because she stopped eating certain foods after the death of her son.

<sup>21</sup> My maternal grandfather, the late Revd Ani Raka, of Hula, Hood Bay, Central Province, told me these marine conservation methods, when I was small boy.

rights.<sup>22</sup> Humans also have a custodial relationship towards trees, rivers, and the mountains, and the other living creatures have responsibilities towards the people.<sup>23</sup>

The beliefs, which the people had in relation to their responsibilities towards environmental care, resulted in the preservation of the environment for future generations. The community knew what to do, and they followed all the cultural regulations pertaining to environmental stewardship. Failure to keep the environmental laws resulted in punishment of offenders. These beliefs led to the maintenance of interrelatedness and interdependence in the community between the people and the environment. Figure 1 portrays this belief in a diagram showing a view of community by the Sentani in West Papua, Indonesia.

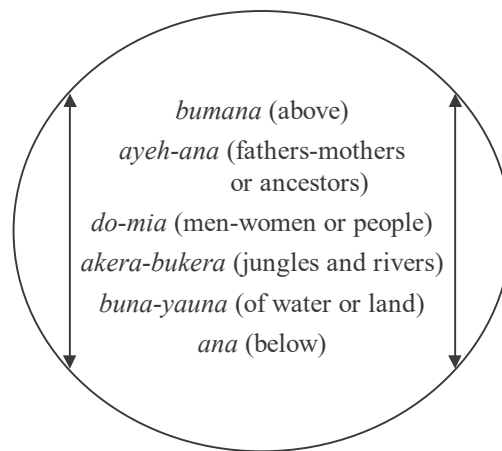


Figure 1: The Sentanian view of community, consisting of the world above and below, and all that is in between, all interrelated, interdependent, and holistic, which is similar to PNG and the South Pacific.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> John D. Waiko, "Traditional Conservation: Ethical Implications", in *Catalyst* 15-1 (1985), p. 16.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Joshua K Daimoi, "An Exploratory Missiological Study of Melanesian Ancestral Heritage from an Indigenous Evangelical Perspective", PhD dissertation, Sydney NSW: School of Studies on Religion, University of Sydney, June 2004, p. 113.

The Sentani worldview is typical of the worldview of Melanesians and Pacific islanders, and shows the importance of people maintaining relationship with the environment. When the people fail to maintain right relationships, through proper environmental care, they will destroy the relationships. It is important to maintain these traditional values, so that there is holistic harmony. By maintaining right relationships, people will respect and protect the environment.

Figure 1 confirms the “household of creation”, which defines ecotheology. The household of creation describes the interrelatedness between humankind and the environment. It is like a big house, with all living things existing as a family. Such a belief system is the way in which Melanesian cultures practised environmental stewardship.

Respecting the environment, and maintaining good relationships with the ecosystem is part of traditional PNG environmental stewardship. A Christian Leaders’ Training College student from Kavieng, New Ireland, told the author that his ancestors had a close relationship with eels, and the people in the area do not kill eels.<sup>25</sup> The Hood Bay people in Central Province practise the fallow system of agriculture by leaving their old gardens for some time, and ploughing the ground again after a few years. The *rikapa* (old garden) remains for three to four years to allow the land to rest.

All the taboos, totemic respect, diet restrictions, and bans on harvest during feasting are some ways of traditional environmental stewardship that existed in the olden times. Since Melanesian people were communally oriented, the community strictly adhered to their traditional ways. While there were many good aspects of culture, there were also bad aspects, which related to mourning, in the olden days. For instance, in some parts of Central Province, the people cut down banana trees, and killed the chicken owned by

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<sup>25</sup> The late Peter Matayai (BTh5 student in 2008) told the author this, after watching an EMTV tourism documentary, which showed footage about local people feeding the eels in Kavieng. People do not harm these eels, and they respect and treat them like human beings. People from the Western Solomon Islands also have a similar belief regarding an eel that gave birth to a woman, who later became their ancestor.

the deceased.<sup>26</sup> The next section will focus on how theology and the practices of the “roots and shoots” period prepared for, and contributed to, environmental stewardship.<sup>27</sup>

### FOCUS ON THE “ROOTS” AND “SHOOTS” PERIODS

During the “roots” period (1796-1880), and the “shoots” period (1840-1900), the term “ecothology” did not exist. However, missionaries became good anthropologists, as they started learning about the cultures of the people they served. Missionaries played a significant role in Alfred Cort Haddon’s interest in anthropology.<sup>28</sup> Previously, Haddon, a secular scientist, was interested in seashells, but this interest changed.<sup>29</sup>

Although the early missionaries in the Pacific were mostly interested in anthropology, their work also included environmental matters, as they studied the lives of the people. For example, George Turner, in his book, *Nineteen Years in Polynesia: Missionary Life, Travels, and Researches in the Islands of the Pacific*, wrote about plants used for clothing, the kava juice, and its religious significance, and the handicrafts from coconut, bamboo, and other plants.<sup>30</sup>

The Samoans used to play pigeon catching as a form of amusement, and the person who caught the highest number of birds was the winner.<sup>31</sup> The people distributed the pigeons, and baked some of them, while they kept

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<sup>26</sup> This bad cultural practice is now dying out. In the olden days, the people would also chop trees and others plants near the house of the deceased. Such actions showed that people had to remove things planted by the dead person, because it reminded them of the one they had lost.

<sup>27</sup> The “roots” period is the time when the early mission agencies started establishing themselves around 1796-1880. The next stage, “shoots”, was between 1840-1900, when the mission areas started spreading to other parts of the South Pacific.

<sup>28</sup> John M. Hitchen, “Relations Between Missiology and Anthropology: Then and Now: Insights from Contribution to Ethnography and Anthropology by Nineteenth-Century Missionaries in the South Pacific”, in *Missiology: An International Review* XXX-4 (October 2002), p. 457.

<sup>29</sup> Hitchen gave this information during his lecture on February 20, 2014.

<sup>30</sup> George Turner, *Nineteen Years in Polynesia: Missionary Life, Travels, and Researches in the Islands of the Pacific*, London UK: John Snow, 1861, p. 202.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.



others for taming. Taming animals was one way in which Pacific islanders practised conservation without knowing about it. They did not have to attend schools or read books on conservation. It was a matter of trial and error, and on-the-job training. Likewise, in PNG, our ancestors also did the same. They knew how to care for animals, and did a good work.

John Williams gives a detailed description of the island groups, which comprise the Cook Islands. His book, *Missionary Enterprises in the South Sea Islands*, has so much useful information for mission historians. The second chapter of his book describes the foliage, the reefs, and other geographical features of the different islands.<sup>32</sup> This book demonstrates that the missionaries were greatly interested in the environment of the different island groups. They had carefully recorded details of animals, plants, and even distinguished those recently-introduced animals and plants. Captain Cook left two animals, which the Tanna people of New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) named them as *tangarooah*.<sup>33</sup>

Turner also described how the Tanna people planted yams, and stated that the sizes of the yams produced astonished him.<sup>34</sup> He noted that taro, breadfruit, coconuts, and sugarcane grew in abundance, and were the principle foods of the people. Even Pacific Island pioneer missionaries of the London Missionary Society (LMS) made careful observation of the local garden produce by writing them down in their diaries. For example, when Rau first visited Manumanu, Central Province, he carefully described the foods that the people brought, which were coconuts, sugarcane, and cooked fish.<sup>35</sup> Rau also took careful note of their environment, customs, and traditional beliefs.<sup>36</sup> The Cook Island missionaries also introduced new

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<sup>32</sup> Williams, *Missionary Enterprises in the South Sea Islands*, p. 23.

<sup>33</sup> Turner, *Nineteen Years in Polynesia*, p. 87.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Mata Tumu-Makara, "The Cook Islands Church Mission Heritage: Relaunching the Global Mission Activities of the Church", MTh dissertation, Auckland NZ: Laidlaw-Carey Graduate School of Theology, 2011, p. 38.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37-50. Rau was one of the first Cook Islands missionaries to be sent by the LMS, who landed at Manumanu, Central Province. His journals and letters described the culture, and the types of agricultural products in the area, which preserved very valuable information. His careful observation contributed to the importance of environmental and

foods, such as, watermelon, when they landed at Manumanu.<sup>37</sup> Such actions show that missionaries loved nature, and they appreciated introducing new foods to the people they served. A sweet potato still bears the name Piri, since the missionaries introduced it, and another species is Waunea.<sup>38</sup> Cook Island missionaries also returned home with PNG plants, especially coconuts and vine used for fish poison.<sup>39</sup>

Although the missionaries did not preach about conservation and environmental stewardship, their worldview and beliefs contributed to ecotheology. For instance, the strict Sunday observance also contributed to environmental stewardship. To this day, my people never go fishing, hunt, or do gardening on Sunday. This means that all creatures rest on this day. When the people do not go fishing, hunting, or gardening they do not disturb the environment.<sup>40</sup> In the early days, missionaries also ordered traders, planters, and even foreign businessmen, to adhere to a strict Sunday observance.<sup>41</sup>

## **NATURAL HISTORY**

Missionaries were also interested in natural history. William Ellis, in 1827 wrote about the natural history of the Sandwich Islands, Hawaii.<sup>42</sup> Two years later, Ellis produced *Polynesian Researches*, covering the Society and Sandwich Islands, which contained a four-volume mine of ethnographic

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cultural practices of that period. Rau's writings and letters, as well as reports from other Pacific Island missionaries, show how the British missionaries had trained these islanders to take careful notes, and be diligent in journalising.

<sup>37</sup> Marjorie Tuainekore Crocombe, "Ruatoka: A Cook Islander in Papuan History", in *Polynesian Missions in Melanesia: From Samoa, Cook Island and Tonga to Papua New Guinea and New Caledonia*, Suva Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies University of the South Pacific, 1982, p. 61.

<sup>38</sup> More information on introduced crops is in the endnotes of Crocombe's article.

<sup>39</sup> Refer to endnotes of Crocombe's article, also.

<sup>40</sup> This practice is similar to the mourning period, and other times of celebration, when people do not fish, hunt, or make gardens, because time is set aside to celebrate, mourn, or worship. That is how my people apply the concept of *velaga* (sacredness). After the celebration, mourning, or worship is over, then people can do what they want to do.

<sup>41</sup> Crocombe, "Ruatoka", p. 71.

<sup>42</sup> Hitchen, "Relations Between Missiology and Anthropology", p. 458.

data.<sup>43</sup> Williams emulated Ellis' interest in ethnography. To Williams, the missionary task also included detailed study and recording of cultural customs and habits.<sup>44</sup> Missionaries also contributed to scientific work. For instance, Chalmers contributed to scientific investigation to demonstrate more fully, "the glory of the works of God".<sup>45</sup> Chalmers' interest in botany and geography changed, after returning from furlough in 1887, to focus on anthropology and ethnography.<sup>46</sup>

The missionaries showed that they were concerned for ecotheology, regarding it as part of their calling. Therefore, they produced volumes of work on ethnography. Being involved in ethnography, they also played their part as stewards in recording and studying culture. Their interest in culture ties in with their role as environmental stewards, since the ecological aspects of their work is included in ethnography.<sup>47</sup> The next section will focus on a recent Pacific theologian, who has contributed significantly, in some ways, to environmental issues.

### **REVD LESLIE BOSETO AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES**

The *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (IBMR) describes Leslie Boseto as the third leading theologian-statesman for being an effective leader in the Pacific islands.<sup>48</sup> He was the first Melanesian Moderator of the United church in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands (UCPNGSI), elected to office in 1972.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 459.

<sup>45</sup> Hitchen, "Training 'Tamate' ", p. 791

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 795. See also pp. 89- 92.

<sup>47</sup> Hitchen, "Relations Between Missiology and Anthropology", p. 457.

<sup>48</sup> The *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* places Boseto as the third significant theologian after Amanaki Havea (Tonga) and Ilaitia Sewati Tuwere (Fiji). Refer to Charles W. Forman, "Finding Our Own Voice: The Reinterpreting of Christianity by Oceanian Theologians", in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 29-3 (July 2005), pp. 115-122.

<sup>49</sup> In the mid-1990s, the UCPNGSI became two churches, because of the isolation, communication, and other needs in the Solomon Islands. Now, there is a separate church in PNG and Solomon Islands. Both churches have their own theological colleges and

Boseto was also the first Solomon Islands Bishop-elect at the formation of the United church in 1968.<sup>50</sup> Prior to the formation of the United church, he was the Synod Chairman, in 1966, of the Methodist church in the Solomon Islands. Boseto's wife, Hazel, was also a great women's leader. She was involved in the Solomon Islands Regional Women's Fellowship. Her attempt at the first regional meeting was successful, because she was a fluent speaker of the *Roviana* and *Babatana* languages.<sup>51</sup>

Boseto was ordained in 1964, after completing theological studies at the New Zealand Bible Training Institute (now Laidlaw College). Later, he attended the Rarongo (United church) Theological College for further studies. In 1991, his election as one of the Presidents of the World Council of Churches (WCC) was a milestone, as he became the first Pacific Islander and Melanesian to be elected to such a position.<sup>52</sup> As a member of the WCC Central Committee, others described him as an "authentic voice of the Pacific" in international gatherings.<sup>53</sup>

Above all, Boseto was an advocate of Melanesian theology about the environment. His passion for Melanesian theology is evident in some of his articles, which were published in church journals. He wrote "Environment

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moderators. However, the United churches in both countries still consult with each other, from time to time.

<sup>50</sup> Lucy H. Money, "First Marama Bishop", in *Ever-widening Circles: Stories of Some Influential Methodist Workers in Solomon Islands and Bougainville/Buka*, Auckland NZ: Wesleyan Historical Society, 2002, p. 22.

<sup>51</sup> Two important languages of the Solomon Islands.

<sup>52</sup> Ann Hogan, "Leslie Boseto: First Solomon Island Bishop", in *Ever-widening Circles: Stories of Some Influential Methodist Workers in Solomon Islands and Bougainville/Buka*, Auckland NZ: Wesleyan Historical Society, 2002, p. 23.

<sup>53</sup> Forman "Finding Our Own Voice, p. 116.

and Community in Melanesia”,<sup>54</sup> “The Gift of Community”,<sup>55</sup> and “Do Not Separate us From Our Land and Sea”.<sup>56</sup>

Apart from environmental issues, Boseto was instrumental in calling for unity among the Pacific Island churches. According to Boseto, God prepared the Melanesian people for the gospel by making them community minded. In his theological writings, Boseto appealed for indigenised theology. To Boseto, the gospel was universal, but needed contextualisation for interpretation in terms of the local culture.<sup>57</sup> In his book, *I Have a Strong Belief*,<sup>58</sup> Boseto stated that people had to be first in his ministry.

His belief in putting people first resulted in numerous visits to many parts of the Solomon Islands, after he completed his term as the Moderator for the United church. Such visits, made during two years, enabled him to learn about the needs of his people. From the trips to different communities, he was deeply concerned about environmental damage to the islands. According to this Solomon Islands’ Christian statesman, loving God also meant loving His handiwork, the earth. He urged the people to protect God’s creation, because, neglecting the environment, angered God. By calling for the protection of the environment, he was adding social ethics into his theology.

While Boseto was on the WCC Committee, and as one of the Presidents, momentum was starting to develop on the call for “Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation” (JPIC). Such a move was relevant to Melanesia, as our people consider the environment, as part of their existence.

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<sup>54</sup> Leslie Boseto, “Environment and Community in Melanesia”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 1-2 (1985), pp. 166-174.

<sup>55</sup> Leslie Boseto, “The Gift of Community”, in *International Review of Mission* 72-288 (1983), pp. 582-583.

<sup>56</sup> Leslie Boseto, “Do Not Separate us From Our Land and Sea”, in *Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II 13 (1995), pp. 69-72.

<sup>57</sup> Forman, “Finding Our Own Voice”, p. 116.

<sup>58</sup> Leslie Boseto, *I Have a Strong Belief: the Reverend Leslie Boseto’s Own Story of His Eight Years as the First Melanesian Moderator of the United Church in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands*, Madang PNG: Unichurch Books, 1983, p. 76.

The purpose of the emphasis on JPIC was to “unite the whole of creation to God by love”.<sup>59</sup> This renewal of interest in the environment was nothing new to Melanesians, because the people have close links with nature. Boseto’s interest did not stop at the global level, through the WCC, but was utilised in the regional sphere as well. As the Minister for Home Affairs in the Solomon Island government, Boseto was instrumental in bringing peace and reconciliation on Bougainville in 1992.<sup>60</sup>

The Bougainville saga emerged from mining and environmental issues on the island. Davidson stressed the economic exploitation and ecological destruction, which came through the huge copper mine, and which did not consider ethnic identity, thus resulting in 10 years of civil war, with the loss of many lives.<sup>61</sup> Being from the Western Solomons, Boseto was, indeed, helping his own neighbours, as a former leading churchman.<sup>62</sup>

Few United church ministers have taken the call by Boseto seriously. The only one who has written on this is Ronnie Tom Ole, from Hula, Central Province. His article entitled, “Making Sense of the Oneness of Life: A Melanesian Christian View on Creation”, is worth reading.<sup>63</sup> He recommends that a united life become an alternative way to today’s life with issues regarding people, nature, modern technology, and science.<sup>64</sup>

Boseto’s plea for the respect of human life and the environment still echoes in the Pacific. American Samoan theologian, Ama’amalele Tofaeno’s doctoral dissertation titled, “Eco-theology: *Aiga* – the Household of Life”,

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<sup>59</sup> Christopher Garland, “Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 6-1 (1990), p. 24.

<sup>60</sup> Allan K. Davidson, “‘The Pacific is No Longer a Mission Field’: Conversion in the South Pacific in the 20th Century”, in *Christianity Reborn: the Global Expansion of Evangelicalism in the 20th Century*, Donald M. Lewis, ed., Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004, p. 152.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> From 1968 to 1991, Revd Boseto was with the Melanesian Council of Churches and the Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA), and, at one stage, was the chairman of both ecumenical bodies.

<sup>63</sup> Ronnie Tom Ole, “Making Sense of the Oneness of Life: A Melanesian Christian View on Creation”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 6-2 (1990), pp. 33-41.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

makes the point worth noting.<sup>65</sup> What is worth noting is that this Samoan clergyman has studied his cultural environmental ethos and recognises the similarities in the Samoan and the biblical views regarding the environment. Tofaeno's dissertation powerfully contextualises the concept of *aiga*, or family, in Samoan social life, which includes the whole family of creation. This dissertation shows the need to recapture traditional values, and relate them to Christianity.<sup>66</sup> Tofaeno's work considers the Bible by taking into consideration the biblical purpose of God as the producer of "sustainable life in communion and unity of all things in creation".<sup>67</sup>

### **ECUMENISM AND AUTHENTIC THEOLOGY**

All this theological thinking has surfaced because the theological interpretation and work is the product of Pacific islanders. This surge of fresh thinking stems from ecumenism, through the Pacific Conference of Churches and the Pacific Theological College. However, Pacific islanders need to keep theologising to keep abreast of social, political, and economic developments affecting the region. The focus on ecotheology refers to the totality of life, and it does not single out the environment, because God placed humans on earth to care for it.

Boseto also believed that God, as the Creator, is concerned for the whole world, the very tiny things, as well as huge mountains, and the oceans.<sup>68</sup> He reiterates that undisciplined structures and uncontrolled systems are a hindrance to mission and development, unless God's love becomes the focal point.<sup>69</sup> According to Boseto, discussion papers, textbooks, or five-year programs will not provide any answers to humankind's needs.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Forman, "Finding Our Own Voice, p. 118, quoting Ama'amalele Tofaeno, "Eco-theology: *Aiga* – the Household of Life", PhD dissertation (in German), Neuendettelsau Germany: Erlangen fur Mission und Okumene, 2000, p. 217.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Leslie Boseto, "Mission and Development: the Role of the Church", in Jeffrey Wall, ed., *Melanesia: the Church and the Future, Point 1* (1978), p. 33.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

For Boseto, development includes people, therefore, the church must not function in isolation, but utilise its people, to participate in the struggle for liberation, to develop their intellectual, physical, social, and spiritual abilities.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, Boseto alludes to “translating global programs into diverse cultural, political, and religious contextual situations”, to unite people, and not just doctrines, theologies, and institutions.<sup>72</sup>

This belief, when applied to ecotheology, is that ordinary Christians need to theologise, and that trained clergy (both men and women) provide guidance, so that God’s people all contribute meaningfully in development. Boseto concurs with Narokobi’s stance on integral human development, which, he states, supports the theme of “the gospel for the whole man, and the whole community”.<sup>73</sup> This means that humankind and the environment relate to each other. It is wrong to exclude people, when discussing environmental issues, and vice versa. Issues that affect the environment also affect humankind.

Finally, Boseto’s conviction on unity comes from nature. He defines solidarity as, “small fish diving in and jumping together, when chased by a big shark or fish”.<sup>74</sup> This means that God’s people in the Pacific must unite to face challenges, such as, nuclear power, transnational corporations, religious movements, and the international economic systems. All these issues also affect the environment.

The next section will analyse and critique the ecotheological issues that have affected PNG, and suggest ways to help churches to be vocally involved in environmental stewardship as part of their mission.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>72</sup> Leslie Boseto, “The Narrative: Reunion of His Graduating Class from the Bible Training Institute, Auckland, New Zealand”, a speech presented at the Reunion for the 1958 Graduates on February 4, 2008. Dr John Hitchen gave this paper to me.

<sup>73</sup> Boseto, “Mission and Development”, p. 35.

<sup>74</sup> Boseto, “The Gift of Community”, in *International Review of Mission* 72-288 (1983), p. 582.



### CRITICAL SUGGESTIONS

This author writes to inform and create awareness, so that believers can be aware of their ecology, and refer to the Bible and their cultures, to develop relevant theology. The author believes that humans and the environment are interrelated and interdependent. This forms the Melanesian view of “oneness with the environment”.<sup>75</sup> With rapid modernisation, Melanesians seem to forget their environment in relation to missions and theology. For most people, it is the social and economic implications that create concern for the environment.

The secular world seems to be very concerned about conservation issues that affect the environment. However, for believers, they have to love God’s creation, because He is the Lord over nature. While some may want to express new ideas for ecotheology, others opt to readjust their theologies to address social and ecological issues. Dr Margaret Guite disagrees with the new theologies, but calls for getting “back to the old theology, and get the balance right”.<sup>76</sup> Guite also states that we do not need a “one-sided interpretation of our tradition” in regard to ecology and human interdependency.<sup>77</sup> However, this writer refutes such statements, because Melanesians need to reinterpret their theology, according to their own context. Without looking critically at one’s own culture and traditions, there will be no contextualisation. The gospel will be meaningless, and may not apply to the Melanesian context.

However, Evangelicals need to get back to the biblical teaching regarding creation, because “the earth is the Lord’s and everything in it”.<sup>78</sup> We cannot claim to love God while abusing what “belongs to Christ by right of creation, redemption, and inheritance”.<sup>79</sup> The Cape Town Commitment also

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<sup>75</sup> Ole, “Making Sense of the Oneness of Life”, p. 40.

<sup>76</sup> Mai Ori, “The Implications of Integrity of Creation for Theological Education and Evangelisation”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 6-2 (1990), p. 28, quoting Margaret Guite, “The Integrity of Creation: Do We Need a New Theology?”, in *Anvil* 7-1 (1990), p. 21.

<sup>77</sup> Ori, “The Implications of Integrity of Creation”, p. 28.

<sup>78</sup> Ps 24:1 (NIV).

<sup>79</sup> “For the Lord We Love”, p. 64.

calls for Christians to repent for their part in destruction of the environment, and for waste, and pollution.<sup>80</sup> Simultaneously, it urges Evangelicals to commit themselves to “prophetic ecological responsibility, and environmental advocacy and action”.<sup>81</sup>

According to David Wilkinson, bearing God’s image is about relationship with God more than any specific human attribute, or pattern of behaviour.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, this relationship involves “sharing in the creative, sustaining dominion of God, thus acting as the visible representatives of His benevolent care for creation”.<sup>83</sup> Therefore, Wilkinson states that there must be Christlike stewardship. So, human beings need to act like servants, and not dictators.<sup>84</sup> This author concurs with Wilkinson’s statement, so that people can act in a Christ-like way to the environment. In addition, Christians need to proclaim environmental responsibility as a “consequence of living under the lordship of Christ”.<sup>85</sup>

The author looks at environmental stewardship from a relational view. Melanesians can describe stewardship in terms of relationships. For example, when someone lends his or her spade to another person, the recipient has to take good care of that item. If the recipient fails to take care of the spade, then that relationship is destroyed. Asians also share this same view, in their cultural understanding of the present-day ecological crises. Pui-Lan Kwok laments that the present ecological crises in Asia are the result of the “breaking down of the great chain that connects human beings, all sentient things, and nature”.<sup>86</sup> Kwok’s comment echoes the concern that the Ok Tedi people had in pursuing a legal battle with BHP in Australia,

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> David Wilkinson, “Bigger Than We Think: the Doctrine of Creation Goes Deeper Than Just Explaining How the World Began”, in *Christianity Today*, 57-2 (March 20, 2013), p. 29.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Pui-Lan Kwok, “Ecology and the Recycling of Christianity”, in *Constructive Christian Theology in the Worldwide Church*, William R. Barr, ed., Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1997, p. 268.

resulting in the Ninth Supplement.<sup>87</sup> From the Ok Tedi experience, the Ninth Supplement Agreement was a conspiracy between the PNG government and BHP to come up with legislation to strike out the environmental issues.<sup>88</sup>

The letter, which David Dakop and his friends wrote, shows how BHP used its money to silence the people, and settle the environmental issues out of court. The actions of the company show that it was using its money to appease the people. Finally, this paper seeks to deal with contextualising environmental stewardship for PNG churches, so that they can look at these issues critically, biblically, and holistically. Without a contextual theology, only secular groups will actively promote environmental conservation in PNG. PNG Christians need to be vocal in promoting environmental concerns among the grassroots people, so that they can be active participants.

### **CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY PROPOSED FOR PNG**

This paper will first look at Polynesian theologians, because they have written so much on contextualisation, and developed different methods to develop local theologies. After evaluating their writing, the author will propose a Melanesian theology of environmental stewardship.

In the 1990s, there was so much attention given by Christians regarding environmental issues.<sup>89</sup> Mainline and Evangelical churches in PNG have all their done their part, in some way, through seminars and conferences. However, this is not enough. Polynesians have taken the lead, through writing theses, and developing local theologies. It seems that Christian leaders do not really understand much about contextualisation.

People misunderstood the leading South Pacific theologian on contextualisation, the late Amanaki Havea. Forman describes him as the

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<sup>87</sup> David Dakop, Karung Dumun, Jacob Aron, "Objection re: OTML", in *Kommuniti Nius* 3-1 (December 2003), p. 3, a letter to the Supreme Court of Victoria, January 7, 2004. The Ninth Supplement was a legal change made to suit BHP, and the people received money for the damage caused to their environment.

<sup>88</sup> Dakop and his friends wrote about the Ninth Supplement Agreement in their letter to the Supreme Court of Victoria.

<sup>89</sup> This was the same period in which Boseto and others talked openly on environment.

“father of Pacific theology”,<sup>90</sup> but other Pacific theologians did not understand the message he was proclaiming. As a pioneer, he had to start somewhere. Fellow Tongan, Roman Catholic theologian, Mikaele Paunga, said that “coconut theology” faded to obscurity, because it demeaned Pacific islanders as “coconut people”.<sup>91</sup> This author disagrees, because the coconut, in Melanesia, is still useful for oil, making brooms, for shelter, and for food. Paunga does not realise that coconut theology was theology from church leaders, and that ordinary believers were not theologising.

Randall Prior rightly stresses the coconut as a symbol of Pacific theology.<sup>92</sup> However, he is wrong to say that such theology does not address pressing social issues.<sup>93</sup> The concept of coconut theology comes from the Pacific islanders’ struggle to be free from theological imperialism.

PNG born, Epeli Hau‘ofa, of Tonga, urges Pacific theologians to look into their own cultures for inspiration.<sup>94</sup> Havea could be right but, as Dr Ma‘afu Palu points out, the process of contextualisation must start from the Bible.<sup>95</sup> While Ma‘afu’s strategy is correct, this author opts for Paulo Koria’s “Moving Towards a Pacific Theology: Theologising with Concepts”, which is a simple step in contextualisation.<sup>96</sup> Often, Melanesian people think in terms of concepts. Therefore, this paper will use Koria’s terminology, but will add some meaningful steps, to help ordinary people to understand the contextualisation process. Koria’s theology of concepts appears to be weak, since it did not look into the New Testament, and lacked critical

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<sup>90</sup> Charles W. Forman, “The Study of Pacific Island Christianity: Achievements, Resources, Needs”, in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 18-3 (July 1994), p. 116.

<sup>91</sup> Mikaele Paunga, “Contours of Contextual Theologies from Oceania”, in *Chakana* 1-2 (2003), p. 56.

<sup>92</sup> Randall Prior, “I Am the Coconut of Life: an Evaluation of Coconut Theology”, in *Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II 10 (1993), p. 31.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>94</sup> Epeli Hau‘ofa, “Our Sea of Islands”, in *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands*, Eric Waddell, Vijay Naidu, Epeli Hau‘ofa, eds, Suva Fiji: University of the South Pacific, 1993, pp. 2-16, quoted in Mikaele Paunga, “Contours of Contextual Theologies”, p. 52.

<sup>95</sup> Palu, “Pacific Theology”, p. 41.

<sup>96</sup> Koria, “Moving Towards a Pacific Theology”, p. 3.

contextualising. However, to be fair, contextualisation is a long process, and can take many years before people accept and embrace it.

This author proposes the following ways to get a clear and meaningful biblical contextualisation. To start with, theologians need to identify a biblical concept related to their culture. Then, they will need to exegete the scriptures, and study the concepts within an Old and New Testament context. After that, theologians and believers need to test the ideas, and evaluate them, in terms of interpretation. The last step is to make the final application.

To develop a Melanesian theology of environmental stewardship, one has to look into the account of creation to discover similar beliefs. The first concept that comes to mind is God's care for humankind and the environment (Gen 1:28). That is the start of environmental stewardship. The directive (in Gen 1:28) shows that God cares about the environment, and about people's welfare. God gave the directive to man to fill the earth and subdue it, but, at the same time, to care for the earth. In the KJV version of the Bible, there is a third command, for man to "replenish the earth". To replenish means to "fill up again". Kadiba states that man has failed to abide by the third directive from God.<sup>97</sup> In addition, rule and subdue refers to man as "creation's servant, and should not exercise despotic authority over nature, but the welfare of the non-human world above its own".<sup>98</sup>

The *Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary* states that the steward was the old English word for a house warden.<sup>99</sup> Now, the term means someone who is responsible for food supplies in a club, or an attendant on a ship or aircraft, or an official, supervising a meeting. In some churches, a steward

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<sup>97</sup> John Kadiba, "Ethics and Development: a Theological Perspective", in Gernot Fugmann, ed., *Ethics and Development in Papua New Guinea, Point 9* (1986), p. 57.

<sup>98</sup> Fred Van Dyke, David C. Mahan, Joseph K. Sheldon, Raymond H. Brand, *Redeeming Creation: the Biblical Basis for Environmental Stewardship*, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1996, p. 39.

<sup>99</sup> Bruce Moore, "steward", in *Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary*, Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 1083.

is a person who arranges the chairs, cleans the church building, sets up the music instruments, and does other duties required by the pastor.<sup>100</sup>

In the New Testament, Paul urged the Corinthians to become a community of stewards (1 Cor 4:1-2). A community of stewards will help minimise environmental pollution and damage.<sup>101</sup> Simultaneously, God has entrusted believers with the “secret things of God” (mysteries). They have to operate as a community of stewards. Importantly, PNG churches must know all about their role as stewards of God’s resources.

In Genesis, God told Adam to “cultivate and guard” the land.<sup>102</sup> The word “cultivate” means to serve the earth, or be a slave to it.<sup>103</sup> In addition, “to keep” שָׁמַר (*sāmar*) in Hebrew, means “to preserve, protect, and maintain the land”.<sup>104</sup> This means that the stewardship, started in Genesis, continues in the New Testament. Therefore, believers need to understand godly stewardship, and speak against issues that affect the environment. The PNG Council of Churches and the Evangelical Alliance in PNG also need to play their role.

Secondly, this paper will focus on similar steps of stewardship in Melanesia. The Tok Pisin term *lukautim*, which means “to care, or look after” is a relevant word to use. As stated earlier, *lukautim* is not just caring, but there is a relational concept attached. A particular student has always left his things with the author, whenever he leaves the college. This student has left his things in the author’s care, because he sees the author as a close friend, and a spiritual father.

Evaluating the cultural concept of environmental stewardship in PNG shows that our human relationship to the land and natural resources is the cause of

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<sup>100</sup> Current second-year MTh student, Sione Lokotui, was a steward in his church back in Tonga arranging chairs, putting out the musical instruments, and organising the seating arrangements for important occasions, and ensuring that everything was in order.

<sup>101</sup> Van Dyke, et al, *Redeeming Creation*, p. 39.

<sup>102</sup> See Gen 2:15 (GNB).

<sup>103</sup> Van Dyke, et al, *Redeeming Creation*, p. 96.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

many disputes in this country.<sup>105</sup> People cannot part with their land and their natural resources, such as, gas, oil, gold, silver, and copper, which belong to the landowners, while PNG law states that everything below the surface of the land belongs to the state.

On the other hand, the Bible clearly states that all things belong to God.<sup>106</sup> There is a conflict, and a dilemma, but the churches have failed to theologise to answer the needs of the people. How does the idea of communal ownership, state ownership, and sovereign ownership relate to godly stewardship? There has to be a balance, somewhere, somehow.

In the concept of “community of stewards”,<sup>107</sup> there is an answer to the problem of stewardship, caused by the different views of ownership. The stewards “are responsible for managing a household . . . but . . . are not the owners or masters”.<sup>108</sup> The idea of stewards ties in with the definition of ecotheology, which means, “the whole household of creation”.<sup>109</sup>

The illustration of a household steward (1 Cor 4:2) shows that the steward was to be faithful in dispensing to the household everything entrusted to him.<sup>110</sup> In the same way, ministers are to expound nothing more or less than the whole counsel of God.<sup>111</sup> It pictures ministers (or theologians) as stewards in God’s household standing between the householder and God’s household.<sup>112</sup> This is where accountability and responsibility come, in terms of theologising and contextualising. The onus is now on theologians to theologise well, to answer issues affecting the environment, and develop relevant theologies to guide the people.

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<sup>105</sup> Resource owners feel intimidated, and young people have used this opportunity to block roads and harass the developers. This has created lawlessness, and produces a bad image of PNG in the overseas media.

<sup>106</sup> Ps 24:1, and 1 Cor 10:26.

<sup>107</sup> 1 Cor 4:1-2.

<sup>108</sup> Dachollom C. Datiri, “1 Corinthians”, in *Africa Bible Commentary*, Tokunboh Adeyemo, ed., Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2006, p. 1381.

<sup>109</sup> “Ecotheology”.

<sup>110</sup> Donald Pickerill, “1 Corinthians”, in *Spirit Filled Life Bible*, Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson, 1991, p. 1723.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

To test this concept, the idea of stewardship starts in the Old Testament, portraying God as the rightful owner. In the New Testament, the community of stewards acted on God's behalf. Culturally, Papua New Guineans regard the environment as belonging to a high God, so they respected the environment. Traditionally, people did not go to sacred mountains and other areas, since they believed that spirits dwelled there. They believed that spirits own those sacred places, so they did not disturb the environment.<sup>113</sup> According to the Garaina people in Morobe Province, anyone who cuts a tree must tell the tree the reasons why the people are cutting it down.<sup>114</sup> This is cultural, environmental stewardship, preserved in a customary practice. These days, people just cut trees down without any good reason. People do not care what they are doing to the environment.

Recently, the author heard of some examples from colleagues and students at CLTC. A faculty wife told the author about how her father is the only one in her village who cleans a spring. When other people clean the area, the water gets muddy.<sup>115</sup> Another student saw a man in his village tie a coconut leaf to stop floodwaters going higher.<sup>116</sup> If this man did not tie the coconut leaf, the flood would spread higher.

The final test in this paper is a word study method, to determine the proper understanding and meaning of the concept, according to the Bible. This paper will look at the biblical definition of stewardship.

**Οἰκονομία** (*oikonomia*) is a compound word in Greek meaning the management of a household.<sup>117</sup> The idea of stewards started during the time

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<sup>113</sup> In some places, such beliefs do not exist, but in other places, such as, Milne Bay, people do not make a noise when they walk past hot springs, and they still practise this belief, to respect the guardians of the environment.

<sup>114</sup> Henoma Ttopogogo, a masters student, shared this concept in a class discussion in 2013. This customary practice of environmental stewardship no longer applies.

<sup>115</sup> The spring knows the owner, and there is a relationship. So, when the owner cleans the spring, there is clean, crystal-clear water. Mary Asi, a schoolteacher of Tauruba, Central Province, gave this information to the author.

<sup>116</sup> BTh4 student, Nathan Mairife, of Koiken, East Sepik Province, gave the information to the author.

<sup>117</sup> Everett F. Harrison, "οἰκονομία (*oikonomia*)", in *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, Walter A. Elwell, ed., Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1973, p. 502.



of slavery.<sup>118</sup> A rich man could appoint a slave to administer his household, and in teaching and disciplining the other slaves and children. A classic example is Joseph (Gen 39:4-4).

*The NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words* defines οἰκονομία (*oikonomia*) as “management of a household”, but was extended to the administration of the state than to any kind of activity resulting from the holding of an office.<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, οἰκονόμος (*oikonomos*) was used of people, and has a more concrete meaning. It denotes the house steward, and, by extension, the managers of individual departments within a household.<sup>120</sup> However, metaphorically, οἰκονόμος (*oikonomos*) also refers to preachers teaching God’s Word (1 Cor 4:1), characters of elders (Titus 1:7), and believers, and the use of their gifts in ministering to each other (1 Pet 4:10).<sup>121</sup>

Therefore to apply biblical stewardship to the environment, preachers must contextualise environmental issues faithfully. Believers need to be Christ-like in dealing with the ecosystem, and that all Christians must utilise their gifts in promoting environmental stewardship.<sup>122</sup>

## SUMMARY

The first question, “What does the Bible say about environmental stewardship?” is answered in the fifth section, headed “Critical Suggestions”, through Gen 1:28. The second section, headed “Traditional Environmental Stewardship”, answers the question regarding PNG’s attitude to environmental stewardship. That section states that people and the environment are inseparable and interrelated. The answer for the third question focusing on the similarities of the Bible and PNG culture is in section three, headed “Focus on the Roots and Shoots Period”. Section three

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Verlyn D. Verbrugge, ed., *The NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2000, p. 897.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White Jr, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, London UK: Thomas Nelson, 1996, p. 599.

<sup>122</sup> This phrase sums up the author’s thinking on a contextual theology for PNG, regarding environmental stewardship, and the church needs to play a leading role in this.

suggests that the *velaga*, or taboo, is similar to Sunday observance. The final question, regarding how PNG Christians can actively participate in environmental stewardship, is in section four, headed “Revd Leslie Boseto and Environmental Issues”, which focuses on the life of Revd Boseto, and section five, headed “Critical Suggestions”, containing critical suggestions.

### CONCLUSION

This paper, therefore, concurs with the concept that “poor theology” has resulted in environmental degradation.<sup>123</sup> To prevent this, churches must faithfully teach, theologise, and contextualise God’s word. The work of environmental stewardship must be the responsibility of the community. Failure to develop a contextual theology will result in serious repercussions.

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<sup>123</sup> Richard Storey, Nicola Hoggard Creegen, “Why Christians Must Care for the Earth”, in *New Vision New Zealand* 111 (2008), Auckland NZ: Tabernacle Books, 2008, p. 139. Faulty theology can result in more environmental degradation in PNG.

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## **TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF BUSINESS FOR CHRISTIANS IN A PRIMAL RELIGIOUS SOCIETY IN A GLOBALISING WORLD**

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### **INTRODUCTION – A CHANGING SITUATION AND NEED**

Evangelical missions, while evangelising and establishing locally-rooted churches, often gave inadequate attention to an applied theology of business, or work, to enable their church members to develop sustainable economic ventures. Thus, the communities they served have not been well equipped for transitioning into the globalised and interdependent economic world of today. There were many reasons for this. Missionaries, themselves, often kept away from business or trading activities, as these were seen as a distraction from their higher calling. But they were necessarily involved in purchasing, trading, and importing, to sustain their lifestyles. Thus, their examples and teaching on economic matters were sometimes confusing, if not contradictory to local people. Their teaching said that business, and the love of money, were temptations to turn us away from the more important matters of our relationship with God. But a good proportion of missionary time and effort was necessarily devoted to acquiring the basics needed for living, and clearly depended on access to finance and economic know-how. The missionaries' own attitudes to work and business had often been "caught" rather than "taught" from the Protestant Christian setting in which they were raised in their home cultures. These often assumed the place and value of the "Protestant work ethic", rather than including teaching about work, as a necessary aspect of basic Christian discipleship. As missionaries,

trusting Christ as Saviour and Lord was the highest priority, and there was a real concern not to encourage any idea that our “work” makes us acceptable before God. So, faith and work were often contrasted, so that the value of manual or business work was either downplayed, or ignored, in instruction on Christian living. When Ossie Fountain wrote, in 1966, looking at whether business programs helped or hindered church life in the CMML<sup>1</sup> areas, he concluded, “if a mission station places too great an emphasis on economic activities, it does not truly reflect what Christ intended the gospel to be”.<sup>2</sup> That fairly reflected the view of most CMML missionaries at that time.

In the first generation of the church in Papua New Guinea, after World War II, that was not too great a problem at first. The newly-arrived Christian missions worked primarily in rural or village localities, where subsistence farming provided a basic lifestyle, although tropical diseases and malnutrition were endemic in many areas. This meant converts continued their subsistence living, with little need for economic change. But that situation has disappeared. Even the most remote villages today are surrounded by, and are usually involved in, commercial mining, forestry, fishing, agricultural and/or oil exploration ventures, which are part of global economic systems. Traditional subsistence lifestyles have radically changed, and economic questions are now of primary social, communal, and ethical importance. The church is still a major, if not the major, agency for guiding change in many such settings, so inadequate teaching on economic and financial matters is now a serious concern, and a priority challenge.

### **THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ISSUE – CHURCH AND MISSION BUSINESS VENTURES**

There is, however, another side to mission and economic development. Alongside the gap in teaching, missionaries initiated several ventures into

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<sup>1</sup> CMML = Christian Missions in Many Lands, the official name under which Christian Brethren missionary work was registered with the PNG government, when it began working in PNG in 1952. Present-day Christian Brethren churches in PNG were established through the work of CMML missionaries.

<sup>2</sup> O. C. Fountain, “Religion and Economy in Mission Station-Village Relationships”, *Practical Anthropology* 13-2 (March-April 1966), pp. 49-58, quote from p. 58.



business activity. These were not always successful or sustained. They were always well meaning, and usually intended to benefit the missionary effort, and local people. We can trace such efforts in Papua New Guinea back to the London Missionary Society's work at both the eastern end of Papua, particularly on the island of Kwato, and in the Papuan Gulf in the early 1900s. As an example of what were called "industrial missions" in the Papuan Gulf, the LMS missionary, F. W. Walker, established *Papuan Industries Ltd.* This company took over coconut plantations, with copra production as the foundation of the business. Unable to raise enough money to make the business sustainable, despite some initial promise, the venture did not last.<sup>3</sup> At the eastern end of Papua, Walker's LMS colleague and friend, Charles Abel, made similar attempts, both at plantation work, and various kinds of vocational training and business during the last decade of the 19th and the first two decades of the 20th century. Again, the success was only partial, and uneven. Abel tried again after World War I on the island of Kwato. The *Kwato Extension Association* gave training in vocational skills to support the desired business ventures. But, again, inadequate capital meant only partial business success.<sup>4</sup> The Kwato Mission, which grew from this initiative, however, has made long-term contributions to the training of tradespeople, who have found employment across the whole of PNG, up to the present.

Later in the 20th century, the Lutheran Mission started a range of businesses, notably *Lutmis Shipping*, trading around the coastal ports of PNG; and *Namasu* (Native Marketing and Supply), the mission-initiated and locally-owned cooperative trade store chain. This was heralded in the late

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<sup>3</sup> Russell Smith, "The Place of the Market in Mission", MTh dissertation, Auckland NZ: Laidlaw Graduate School, 2010, pp. 75-100; F. W. Walker, *The Papuan Industries Ltd., Its Progress and Aims*, London UK: LMS, 1908; Ross M. Weymouth, "The Gogodala Society in Papua New Guinea and the Unevangelized Fields Mission, 1890-1977", PhD thesis, Adelaide SA: Flinders University of South Australia, 1978, pp. 64-89; Tony Austin, *Technical Training and Development in Papua 1894-1941*, Pacific Research Monograph Number One, Canberra ACT: ANU, 1978, pp. 50-103.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, "Market in Mission", pp. 83-95; David Wetherell, *Charles Abel and the Kwato Mission of Papua New Guinea, 1891-1975*, Melbourne Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1996.

1960s as “New Guinea’s largest indigenous-owned company”.<sup>5</sup> *Namasu* provided the backbone of the trade-store and coffee-marketing supply lines, which developed as the highway network extended from the coast into the Highlands of PNG. A number of Evangelical Alliance-related churches and missions developed similar business projects, such as *Menduli*, the United Church Southern Highlands business arm; and *Pasuwe* (Papuan Supply and Welfare) of the Unevangelized Fields Mission (Asia Pacific Christian Mission – now Pioneers) and Evangelical Church of Papua. Ross Weymouth explains, “(*Pasuwe*) was established in 1969 by the UFM out of the existing mission-supply and trade-store operations, as a non-profit organisation. Prior to this, the mission had run a trade store on each of the mission stations. (*Pasuwe*’s) main aims were: ‘to provide for the Papua New Guineans’ Christian training, medical and educational facilities, general welfare services, and training in professional, commercial, and industrial skills’ ”.<sup>6</sup>

The patterns of development, and the flourishing and decline of these business programs, deserve careful study, to inform present and future possibilities for business development. How these mission/church initiatives related to, and were influenced by, the transitions in the nation’s retail industry generally might also be instructive. The transition of retail business from the hands of the long-established Pacific trading companies (such as Burns Philp, Colyer Watson, and Steamships), through the period of increasing migrant Chinese influence, to the diversification of small, PNG-owned businesses today, could also clarify trends, and highlight significant factors.

The Christian Leaders’ Training College’s economic support programs contribution to the dairy, cattle, and poultry industries in PNG is another example. But the CLTC support story has not yet been written or analysed. CLTC’s focus on producing income to meet part of the theological education costs for the College’s students is a distinctive factor in its commercial

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<sup>5</sup> I. J. Fairbairn, W. Fugmann, G. Sankoff, *Namasu: New Guinea’s Largest Indigenous-owned Company*, New Guinea Research Bulletin No 28, Canberra ACT: ANU Press, 1969.

<sup>6</sup> Weymouth, “Gogodala Society”, p. 263, citing *Light and Life* (October 1973), p. 4.

involvement. It has also modelled a pattern of locally-generated support for Christian ministries to the successive generations of students studying on its Banz campus. CLTC also gave birth to the short-lived Alliance Training Association (ATA), with programs in trucking, saw-milling, and timber products. Again, ATA offers significant lessons and warnings in its different attempts to build viable diversified business with limited, and ultimately inadequate, capital resources. ATA has, however, made an ongoing contribution, since some of its trade trainees are still running successful transport businesses.

Within particular missions and churches, such as the Christian Brethren churches and CMML, a number of specific ventures, mainly local in extent, await analysis to understand their strengths and weaknesses, and why they declined and closed. Both expatriate and local perspectives on projects, such as, BMB (*Bia Mogo Bulene* – The Helper) at Koroba, the World Vision agriculture projects, or Paradise Furniture at Lae, would be helpful for forward planning. There might also be valuable insights if we compared those short-lived ventures with the long-term success of Christian Books Melanesia in its retail and publishing business.

Both these historic aspects – the gap in missionary teaching about work or business, and the range of only partially-successful ventures into mission or church-based business – deserve further analysis and evaluation to guide present and future church-related economic ventures.

### **TOWARDS SOME BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS**

We turn now to suggest some areas of biblical teaching, which offer a foundation for encouraging church members to take a lead in the economic development of their societies.

We make an important assumption: to chart an appropriate course through the present-day business challenges will require a transformation of worldview presuppositions. We will need to clarify, and either endorse or transform, traditional primal religious beliefs influencing the transition into the present-day world of business, commerce, and global economic interdependence. Alternative Western secular approaches do not offer the

necessary, integrated, holistic worldview. Such integration will retain the benefits of traditional perspectives, and give proper attention to spiritual needs and realities. An integrated biblical foundation will also enable us to make informed choices about the aims and purposes of any business, or commercial ventures. Not having such an accompanying integrative worldview may have been a significant reason why some business attempts failed in recent decades in PNG.

Where, then, as Christians, do we start when seeking a biblical foundation for constructing a sound approach to business and economic involvement?

### **FOUNDATIONAL BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR A CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO BUSINESS**

The record of God's self-revelation at creation is an appropriate starting place.

#### **THE LIVING GOD IS A WORKER HIMSELF**

The very first pages of the Bible present God as the Creator, making things, shaping, forming, designing, ordering, and evaluating His work (Gen 1). One of the particular roles of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament was to gift human craftspeople with the knowledge, abilities, and skills to create, fashion, and design buildings, utensils, garments, and ornaments for the Tabernacle, in which His people would meet with God (Ex 31:1-11). Such skills of craftsmanship are one essential requirement for business enterprises. When God became human, in Jesus of Nazareth, He sanctified, and gave particular dignity to, manual labour. Jesus showed this by being born into a worker's family, and growing up as a carpenter's son, who followed his father's trade (Mark 6:3). So, as the most basic reason, we will want to be involved in business, because this is one way we can be like our Maker God, who, Himself, is a creative worker.

#### **THE CREATED WORLD ABOUNDS WITH INTRINSIC VALUE AND IS GOOD IN GOD'S SIGHT, FULL OF DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL**

The works of God's creating hand have worth and value to God their maker. We are to value and respect the dignity of the created world, because it

expresses the mind and will of God. Creatures and the creation are not to be worshipped, but neither are they to be abused or exploited. Nor are they to be feared, since they are not, in themselves, gods or spirit powers. Rather, they have their own proper place in the ecology of the universe. Each species, “according to their kind”, has inherent powers of reproduction and intuition to live and flourish. Moreover, as we shall develop further, later, creation and other creatures are good gifts from God. They are entrusted to us, as humans, to care for, and responsibly manage. All the creatures and resources of the universe are essential parts of the environment, within which we know and serve God. The resources of the universe are vast, not limited. They are abundant, given for us to explore, discover, and use wisely. Many primal societies have believed there is only a limited amount of good in the world. They say we can only gain access to it when we carefully follow the tribal laws (*lo*), and rituals the ancestor spirits gave us. Moreover, if one tribal group has more than another, it is said they have used some spiritual power to steal what should be equally available to every tribe. But, while there are limits to the non-renewable resources on the earth (like oil and gas), humans have only discovered, and are only using, a small proportion of the riches God has provided for all humanity to enjoy in the physical world around us. Papua New Guinea has never had a shortage of good resources in its environment. This wealth of potential resources provides incentive to constructively utilise them through business ventures.

These first two points present a significantly different understanding of the nature of material things, and where they fit in the cosmological order, from traditional Melanesian primal religious thought. These two points are also very different from the assumptions of the secular worldviews in the West. The Bible tells us God Himself is a creative worker, who has provided us with a rich abundance of good resources in the universe to discover and enjoy, so that we can become productive workers like Him. This is a sound basis on which businesses can develop.

### **AS CREATURES, MADE IN GOD’S IMAGE, HUMANS ARE CREATIVE WORKERS**

Our basic human identity, and our value as persons, come from being made in the image of God. Humans reflect and represent our maker God within

His creation. Thus, as part of that image-bearing reality, we are workers by nature. We have inherent abilities to think, plan, and design. Like our God, we are able to make, form, and shape things from and with the raw materials and active forces of the physical world. Humans are business-capable creatures in a universe inviting good exploratory business.

**HUMANS RECEIVE THE RESOURCES OF THE WHOLE WORLD AS A GOD-GIVEN TRUST TO MANAGE RESPONSIBLY, IN OBEDIENCE TO THE ORIGINAL “CULTURAL MANDATE”**

Humans are the crown of God’s creation. God expects us to work with, and to look after the physical creation. God gives, or entrusts, His creatures, and all the potential of the creation, to humans, to guard, protect, and “keep”, or conserve. This is not a licence to exploit, or dominate and use to excess, the resources of our planet. Rather, we are to make good use of it, to develop, and wisely make it productive, as a trust from God, for the good of our fellow creatures, and for the good of future generations. The Bible explains that, as humans, we will give an account to God about the way we have fulfilled this responsibility for the resources God entrusts to us. This is explained in the first commands God gave to the first human beings, as recorded in Gen 1:28-30; 2:15, 19-20. These instructions are called the “cultural mandate” for humanity. They indicate that our human purpose is to bring the material and cultural world under ordered control, to organise and regulate it, and name, care for, sustain, and make it productive.

**BUSINESS IS A KEY PART OF THE ORIGINAL MANDATE AND IS EXPRESSED VARIOUSLY IN DIFFERENT CULTURES**

This “cultural mandate” in the first two chapters of Genesis speaks about our human responsibility for the created world, and the creatures in it. It says: “Be fruitful, increase (multiply) . . . fill the earth . . . subdue it . . . work it, take care of it, . . . name them”. We need to think about what these commands involve.

*Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth* means we are to live to the full, as people developing all our human capacities for thinking, speaking, and communicating. We are to develop our capacity for learning, and all kinds of knowledge, for art, music, drama, and imagination. We are to flourish

and discover all we are able to do, personally, and as societies. We are to enjoy the full range of our competencies. Multiplying also means reproducing: exploring all the possibilities of parenting, of family life, of extended family, clan, tribe, and community life. This involves social organisation, political activities, leadership structures, intergroup relationships, and international affairs. Being fruitful, then, means not sitting and doing nothing, but studying, exploring, experimenting, evaluating, and improving our world. It means growing, and fully developing all these areas of human life.

*Subduing the earth, working and caring for it, and naming the creatures* involve the whole human enterprise of exploration, discovery, manufacture, and invention. In other words, all of both the theoretical and practical realms of science, technology, ecology, geography, physics, zoology, biology, agriculture, horticulture, economics, business, commerce, etc. These are our God-given human responsibility. For humans to do what these commands require, we need to organise ways of sustaining our lives together. We need to produce and share the materials and products necessary to thrive and flourish in our different communities. Once different peoples have settled in different areas, with different access to the range of resources needed for humans to flourish, we have to develop some means of trading with each other. In this way, we can access the materials we need to sustain life, and to develop further. Therefore, trading, marketing, and businesses became an essential part in humans fulfilling this original cultural mandate.

But many different patterns of business and trading have been developed in different cultures.

In the Appendix, we compare two of these approaches to business: a gift- and relationship-based *wantok* business, and a commodity- and capital-based market business. We are not suggesting one of these is right and the other wrong. They are just different, and both work well in different situations. When God created humans in His image, He created us with the ability to develop distinct cultures, with varying approaches to every aspect of life. Our example in the Appendix shows that one or the other cultural

understanding of business and economics may be better suited to a particular business situation. Thus, a group, considering setting up a business, needs to work out which kind of cultural approach to business is better able to meet the needs and opportunities they are considering.

### **BASIC GUIDELINES FROM THE COMMANDMENTS FOR CHRISTIAN INVOLVEMENT IN BUSINESS**

If we compare a Christian business to a well-constructed house, then we now consider the strong walls that are built on the “foundations” we have laid in the previous section. Strong “walls” are vital to enclose the business safely, and protect it from collapse or failure. We find these “safe walls” for a “business house” in the biblical commandments, and these, too, apply to businesses in any cultural setting.

The Ten Commandments are pointers to the good life for God’s people. Commandments are never sufficient to bring us into the good life God planned for us. We must have faith in Christ for that. But the Commandments were given to point the way to Christ and to prepare the way for the fullness of life, which is available only in Jesus Christ (John 10:10). Some of the commandments are like signposts, marking the way, not only to the good life, but also to good business practice.

#### **THE 4TH COMMANDMENT – BALANCING REGULAR WORK AND TIME FOR REFRESHING WORSHIP (EX 20:8-11; DEUT 5:12-15)**

This fourth commandment lays a strong foundation for good business practice. Here is the secret to a productive, good life (*Dispela tok i makim tru bilong pasin bilong gutpela sindaun*). Businesses can only succeed if both employers and workers give a full week of reliable work each week. This what Ex 20:9 requires. Consistent, regular work from the whole team is the first essential for a good business. No business will succeed if some of the staff take two days off this week for a funeral, then another couple of days next week for a marriage, then another day off a fortnight later to go hunting. Before this commandment says anything about times for rest, it says: “six days you shall labour and do all your work”. Having a day for rest only makes sense when we work for the rest of the week. The Bible takes for granted that a commitment to a well-ordered work-life is the



proper, normal thing for us to do. In 2 Thess 3:10-12, Paul is quite clear: “We gave you this rule: Anyone who is unwilling to work shall not eat. We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy, they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat.” So, the first clue this commandment gives, in pointing towards a successful business, is the expectation that staff will be on time, do a full day’s work, every day, each week. This is a real challenge to employees and employers alike, both in Western cultures and in Melanesian culture. But, if there is a “secret” to business success, this is where it starts.

The same commandment also stresses that good businesses give proper, regular times of rest and refreshment for their staff and equipment. Proper rest means time for spiritual renewal and worship, as well as physical refreshment. The Sabbath pattern of one day’s rest in seven recognises the basic needs of our human bodies, minds, and spirits. We cannot keep giving out in fruitful work without time to pause, and be restored as whole people. This command to keep one day in seven free from work is not a harsh law, imposing a heavy duty on us. Jesus clarified this when He said, “The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). The rhythm of regular work and rest is a gift from God for our human fulfilment. It is the pattern God Himself followed in the creation (Ex 20:11). The wise business manager knows the workplace is a happier and more productive place when people follow this rhythm. The chief thing about this command is keeping this well-ordered pattern of regular work and rest, not the particular day on which the rest is taken. Good businesses, then, care about the whole person of the workers, and do not exploit, or take advantage of them. A good Christian business will provide both definite expected weekly work times and daily working hours, as well as rest times and holidays. When employers fulfil their duty in regard to giving proper rest times, then we can expect the workers to fulfil their part and work consistently and regularly for the proper hours each week.

**THE 8TH COMMANDMENT – RESPECTING OWNERSHIP  
AND VALUING WORK DONE (EX 20:15; DEUT 5:19)**

The command, “Do not steal” also has an important application in the business world. It reminds us that all the materials, products, and equipment we use in a business have been designed and produced through someone else’s ideas, time, labour, and, usually, expense. The work materials also now belong to someone else, or to the business, who have spent time, effort, and expense to procure them. What we make with our ideas, our skills, our abilities, and our resources is special in God’s eyes. We are producing things to serve and honour Him. Therefore, the products we make have special value to God, and before others. This is why our personal and communal possessions are to be protected, respected, and looked after. The command requires us to respect the value of other people’s effort, and of their ownership of property. Theft and stealing do not respect another person’s rights to own what they have properly made, or earned, or purchased. We should reimburse, or pay back, those who have used up their effort, time, and expense to make the goods available. This is still true when the goods are owned by, or on behalf of, a group to which we belong. Every community has its own rules for granting permission for members to use the group’s possessions. Not gaining that permission in the proper way is stealing. So is wasting materials, wilfully destroying property, borrowing equipment without intending to return it, and wrongly recording quantities used on a job. These are all forms of theft, which destroy trust between workers and management. Theft like this can easily cause financial difficulties for the company. Eph 4:28 warns that the Christian way is not to steal, but to work, so we can earn sufficient to be able to help others in need.

The command not to steal also calls for fair wages and adequate working conditions. Employers can steal from their employees, if they do not provide proper conditions for work. In passages like Eph 6:5-9 and Col 3:22-4:1, the Bible stresses these principles, when it instructs “masters” to properly care for their “slaves”. In biblical times, the “master” filled the role of an “employer” in modern society, and “slaves” can be compared to “employees”. The command not to steal protects both our right to own personal property, and for our work to be properly valued. Reliable business requires a workplace where there is no stealing.

**THE 9TH COMMANDMENT – RESPECTING WORDS USED  
AND PROMISES MADE (EX 20:16; DEUT 5:20)**

Lying, telling only half the truth, exaggerating, making promises you never intend to fulfil are examples of the “false witness” this command condemns. Using deceitful words to entice someone to do what you want, spreading rumours or false stories about others, or signing papers you know are incorrect: all these are also forbidden by this command for a Christian business. Eph 4:15 and 25 are wise guidelines for business practice: “speak the truth in love”, “each of you must put off falsehood, and speak truthfully to your neighbour, for we are all one body”. Dishonesty destroys trust. But trust is the necessary foundation for all business transactions. Businesses are like “bodies”, we often call them “corporate bodies”. So, as Eph 4:25 says, if you cannot rely on the promise a member of the body gives, then everyone gets hurt. This warning about false witness also includes what we say in our bookkeeping and financial accounts. False figures are just as wrong as false words, and equally destructive in business. Jesus’ advice is best: “All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’, or ‘No’, anything beyond this comes from the evil one” (Matt 5:37). Nothing is more important in business than to be able to trust the word and promise of the business people with whom you work.

**THE 10TH COMMANDMENT – CONTROLLING IMPROPER DESIRE,  
AND RESPECTING CONTRACTED RELATIONSHIPS AND  
OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY AND PRODUCTS (EX 20:17; DEUT 5:21)**

Coveting (greedily desiring for ourselves) the possessions of others is wrong. Like the eighth commandment (against stealing), the tenth (against coveting the possessions of others) is protecting the proper value of what belongs to us, or what we produce through our work. Notice the things we are commanded not to greedily desire, and think of the present-day equivalents in business: “Do not covet your neighbour’s wife”, says plainly that seeking sexual favours from relatives of staff has no place in business. “House or land” (Deut 5:21) included the living place and business place in Bible times. Land was the business resource, which could be made profitable. So, we should not try to deceitfully get for ourselves the business assets, which rightfully belong to someone else. The “male or female slaves” were the

workforce of Bible times. So, here is a warning against enticing to your business someone in whom their present employer has invested training, trust, and responsibility. This is a particular problem at this stage of business in PNG. There are only a few well-educated, experienced business people. But we should properly negotiate with their business owners when we have any desire for one of their workers to come and work for us. Just pulling them away with offers of better pay is a form of coveting that this command forbids. Doing this spoils business plans, and steals the previous hard work and trust others have invested in their workers. In Bible times “the ox or donkey” were the “tools” or “equipment” needed to make the person’s business productive. So, again, enviously using underhanded ways to get another business’ equipment or special tools is forbidden. These listed persons or things are only examples. The command ends, “Do not covet . . . anything that belongs to your neighbour”. Open honesty is essential in all business dealings: there is no place for selfish greed, deceit, or trickery.

We could go on to show how all ten of the commandments have valuable business lessons, but these four are especially important to surround and protect good business. We do well to ponder where and how they need to be worked out in our own business attitudes and behaviour.

### **COMMON CONCEPTS AND COMMITMENTS ESSENTIAL FOR CHRISTIANS IN BUSINESS**

As well as these foundational teachings and “safe-wall” instructions, the scriptures give some key concepts and attitudes, which are like the ceiling and roof of the “business house”, completing its framework, and tying it together for good business.

#### **A KEY BIBLICAL TERM FOR A BUSINESS PERSON – RESPONSIBLE MANAGER OR STEWARD**

The Bible describes Christian workers as stewards, or responsible managers. Responsible managers give an account to God about the way they have fulfilled the trust He has put in them by giving them all the earth’s resources, to develop for His glory, and for human good. Joseph is one of the best biblical examples of a responsible manager or steward (Gen 39-50). Joseph showed that this way of describing a leadership role applies in the world of

government and business, just as much as in church leadership. Reliability, trustworthiness, open integrity, compassion, and faithful accountability are the qualities Joseph's life demonstrates. These are the marks of a good manager. Jesus' parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30; Luke 19:12-27) builds on those ideas. The parable reminds us that we are each trusted with a measure of competence, ability, and resources be developed to the full. We fulfil this trust for the glory of God, and the good of our fellow humans. Jesus again stresses accountable responsibility, which such a trust brings. Paul adds to this in 1 Cor 4:1-5, where he says faithfulness, and knowing who our true judge is, are the most important ideas in this responsible-manager concept.

Thinking of business as responsible management also reminds us that we receive the gifts of resources, abilities, opportunities, and accountability, as members of communities – our families, tribes, and wider societies. While we have a personal responsibility to fulfil the trust God puts in each of us, He also expects us to fulfil our management roles as partners in His family and His body. Therefore, our relationships with our *wantoks* and wider communities are also vital, as we exercise care for creation, and responsibly serve each other and God with all our gifts and abilities. Christian businesses recognise they have a social responsibility for the welfare of the community, and not just a responsibility to make profit for the individuals in the business. A Christian business, therefore, in its purpose statement, will give special attention to identifying the social benefits it seeks to meet. The business will set out how it aims to improve the health, education, and communal well-being of its societies. The New Testament teaching that we are all members of the body of Christ, each with our own contribution to make, and each needing the contribution of all others, can be applied to the “body corporate” of the business world, too.

### **BUSINESS, LIKE ALL WORK, IS DESCRIBED IN THE BIBLE AS A “VOCATION” OR “CALLING” FROM GOD**

Christians understand work as a vocation – a calling – in which we fulfil the will of God for us personally. This gives added incentive to the quality, standards, and motives for our work. At times, in the history of the church, people have gained the idea that only those who are serving the church as

ministers, pastors, or full-time workers are doing God's work. But, at the time of the Reformation, that was seen to be very wrong. The Reformers rediscovered the biblical teaching that God calls – or gives a vocation to – every believer. He calls us all to follow Christ, and He calls us all to serve Him in our daily lives, through our regular occupations. For many of us, that means we are called to serve Him in business. This sense of work as a “vocation” (the Latin word for “calling”) gives our daily occupations dignity and proper respect. As Paul reminded the Colossian Christians: “whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus. . . . Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Col 3:17; 23-24).

This is good news for many Christians in Melanesia. We, too, have often had the wrong idea that only work in the church, or for the church, is God's work. Sometimes we were told that we should not make money in ordinary work, we should show our love for God by serving Him in Christian church work. God does call some people to do this. But He calls many more to serve Him in ordinary occupations, in all different kinds of work. He desires us to show His love in those workplaces as our lives and work habits serve our workmates. He wants us to work so well that we improve the quality of the work, and give honour to God by being the best workers we can be. This pleases God, and is the normal way to earn money to care for our families, and to be able to give to support the work of the church. We need to rediscover the dignity and honour of serving Christ in the workplace.

***For Christians, These Basic Human Business Capacities and Responsibilities are Enhanced and Confirmed as Part of our Service and Worship for our Redeemer***

The “cultural mandate” was part of God's gift to all humans as part of God's work as Creator. We have seen that the mandate gives all humans opportunities and responsibilities. Those who know God, not only as Creator, but also as Saviour, have extra reasons for wanting to serve God through all we do, including our business lives. Eph 2:8-10 reminds us that God, by His undeserved grace, has saved us, so that we can become

committed to good work. When we have received His free salvation, which cost us nothing, but cost our Lord Jesus His life on the cross, God remakes us for His original purpose: so that we can do His will, and do good in our world. So, we are responsible to work, because we are human beings made in God's image. That is true of all humans, everywhere. But, when we know we are also new creatures, remade by the love and kindness of God, then our work becomes doubly important. For Christians, giving our best in developing a high-quality business, or doing our best to make the business, of which we are part, become a better business, are ways we can say thank you to God for His gift of new life and salvation. I once heard Robert Laidlaw, the well-known Christian business man, after whom Laidlaw College (where I work in New Zealand) is named, say, in a sermon on Christians in business: "When I look down the newspaper lists of jobs available, why don't I see on every job advertisement the words, 'Christian preferred . . . Christian preferred'? If we really appreciate what Christ has done for us at Calvary, then we Christians should be the most-committed, hard-working employees in the country. So, every sensible boss would want to employ Christians! Why isn't that happening?" Are Christians known as the best workers in your area? If not, why not?

#### ***A Reminder About How We Use the Bible for Business Guidance***

As we seek to serve God in our daily business, we need to take care in the way we use the Bible to guide our business life. The scriptures often give more than one perspective on the same question. We have to learn to hold these different perspectives together, and in balance. As just one example, *there is always an inherent tension between two aspects of the management or stewardship responsibility we have just mentioned*. On the one hand, as we have just noted, we are responsible to serve, care for, and sustain our *wantoks*, communities, and nation. Indeed, we have a duty to support our fellow humans, wherever they are in need, right around the world. We saw that one key purpose and goal of business is to fulfil this social responsibility. So, we will want to share business profits with our extended families, as soon as we can, to help meet their many needs, like health and education costs. But, on the other hand, we are also directly accountable to God not to neglect, or abuse, or waste, the potential in the resources He entrusts to us. As creative image-bearers of God, we are expected by God to

find the potential in our land, our minerals, our store of cultural knowledge, and our intellectual abilities. We need to create and develop new materials and articles, using the potential we have discovered in God's gifts. But, to do this, we need to keep some funds (capital) for this research, and the development of new products. If we give away all our income, as soon as we earn it, to meet our social responsibilities, we will never have the funds to develop new products, or to improve the business, to ensure it grows and lasts. Unless we reinvest enough money into developing the business, we will not be able to ensure it has a secure future. So, that means avoiding quickly passing on all the income to help others. We must hold back enough of the profits to make sure the business becomes strong and secure. Finding the balance between these two aspects of serving God in our business is not easy. It means we have to educate our relatives and families, so that they also want the money to be there for development, and for sustainability. This will mean learning not just to demand all the income be distributed as soon as it is available. The parable of the "talents" in Matt 25:14-30 emphasises this aspect of developing the full potential of what God has entrusted to us. The parable also implies we should plan well for longer-term results, in the way we use our resources. Stimulating a long-term view of business processes, by not just adopting a "get rich quick" way of thinking, is part of the challenge facing business processes in PNG.

### ***Making Money is not Wrong***

These common concepts of: a business person as a responsible manager; business work as a calling or vocation; the added incentive to excellence in business, because we know the Redeemer; and the reminder to hold together all that the Bible says on particular business issues, are helpful clarifying concepts for moving into business as a Christian. We can also add, that *earning money through honest, upright hard work is not wrong, nor is it giving in to temptation, when we work hard for proper wages*. The bible does not teach that money is evil. 1 Tim 6:10 says, "the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil". If we only desire more and more money, then we will fall into temptation, as 1 Tim 6:9 says. But, as we go into business and work well for a good wage, if our motives and desires are to please God, and to help our own communities, then that is the way to bring glory to God. Money, itself, is neither good nor bad. It is what we want it for, and the way



we use it, that make money either good or bad. The Christian way is to see earning money as part of our service and worship to God.

### **ESSENTIAL CHARACTER ATTRIBUTES FOR CHRISTIAN BUSINESSES**

We now need to emphasise what has been suggested in all we have said so far. To run a successful business, we need not only business knowledge, skills, and technical ability. Even more important, are the following character patterns, attitudes, and habits. These are the characteristics that anyone entering our “business house” should see displayed in all they find in our business practices.

#### **TRUST AND TRUSTWORTHINESS**

To participate productively in the global business world today, we must be able to trust our staff, our business clients, our accounting staff, and the various other officials or agents, with whom we work in the business. The necessary foundation is not there for a business to work well, without openness, mutual respect, and knowing we can trust the word and promises of all we serve or depend on. But, if we are to trust others, then they must find us worthy of their trust, too. So trust works both ways – we expect it in others, and we must prove trustworthy in every way ourselves. This two-sided character quality of trusting and being trustworthy is basic for good business.

#### **HONESTY AND INTEGRITY**

Speaking and doing the truth at all times is the next mark of a successful business person. Honesty is always the best policy in the business world, where “you can be sure your sins will find you out”. Honesty with the governing board, with staff, customers, suppliers, and also ourselves, when problems or difficulties arise, gives strength to any business. We join this quality with integrity: the attitude which means we are consistently open and transparent. This means never accepting a bribe, or twisting the facts to manipulate others for our own advantage, never using deceitful measures, or untrue reporting to turn decisions in our own favour. Keeping our motives pure, and “walking in the light” is sound biblical advice in business practice (Phil 1:9-10; 1 John 1:5-7). Integrity calls us to not cover up the truth, and

not hiding, or hiding from, problems that need attention. There are times when an employer needs to “not let his left hand know what his right hand is doing” (Matt 6:3), when, for instance, you are at the early stages of a project, and you need more information, or need to do more testing before making your plans or product known. But that does not mean being deceitful or twisting the truth. The wrongdoing of Ananias and Sapphira was their lack of integrity, not their decision to only give a part of their income to the apostles. They were always free to do that, as Peter said. But they were lying to God the Holy Spirit when they tried to make the church think they had given all the proceeds of their property sale to the church. This deceit and lack of integrity caused them to receive judgment from God. Having integrity, and being trustworthy, go closely together in business dealings.

#### **DEPENDABILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

Being dependable is also linked with trustworthiness. Both managers and workers need to be able to depend, or count on, each other. An unreliable member of staff can spoil teamwork, and affect the whole business. Arriving at work on time, being there for the full time expected, carrying out a job to the end, keeping your word, and fulfilling your commitments, are habits other workers respect, and that employers really appreciate. No one needs special qualifications to show these characteristics. Accountability adds to dependability the extra quality of taking responsibility for the quality of our work, and reporting it properly. Blaming others for things we have done poorly spoils relationships among staff. Keeping records of the operation of the part of the business, for which we are responsible, and reporting regularly to those above us in the business structure, are ways we demonstrate our accountability. It is very difficult to evaluate where a business can be improved if responsible people at each level do not accept these accountability duties. Record keeping and reports provide the data we need to plan well for growth, and to correct problem areas in any business. Dependability and accountability are both habits we need to cultivate as young people, and steadily improve throughout our business life. They are the marks of character, which employers look for when considering promotions.

### **UPRIGHT JUSTICE AND IMPARTIAL FAIRNESS**

Treating employees fairly, and being consistent, by treating all staff with the same levels of respect and personal or emotional support, should set Christian businesses apart as good places of employment. This means, of course, fair pay, no inappropriate pressure on staff to do overtime. To be just and fair, managers, will need to know their staff personally, so as to help them in their times of family or personal needs. Favouring one person, or group of persons, over others, and changing the way company policy is applied to different groups, soon undermines morale and confidence in the staff team. But, open fairness without favouritism creates loyalty, and a willingness to “go the extra mile”, when necessary for the business. Good businesses have clear pathways for staff to express a concern, or make a complaint about the way the business is running, and wise managers attend promptly to any such concerns.

### **COMPASSION AND KINDNESS**

Justice and fairness are not enough on their own, as sometimes they can be administered coldly, and without much feeling for the people involved, So, Christian businesses seek also to blend compassion, empathy, and kindness into their operations. Words of appreciation and encouragement, both when things are done well, and when the task is hard and demanding, and thoughtfulness in the way new requests or changes are introduced to the workers, are simple ways to show compassion among the workers. Most workers like to see the senior managers walking around among them, and talking personally with them. Our Lord Jesus Himself is our model in these aspects of interpersonal relationships with staff and customers in a business.

There are no magical secrets, which can automatically guarantee success in any business. But, where a united team of management and workers aim for these qualities of personal character, attitudes, and habits, they foster a good working environment – a strong “business house”.

### **A SUMMARY – IN WORLDVIEW TERMS**

In summary, we can say these teachings seek to introduce a number of fundamentally new attitudes, at the worldview level. We can bring them

together, using ideas developed by the late Harold W. Turner, whose studies on primal societies are still of vital significance. He suggested, in an article presented to a South American seminar on religion and global poverty in 1985, that there are five basic movements needed in a primal society's worldview if it is going to participate successfully in the global economies of today.<sup>7</sup> Each of His five points deals with one of the major areas of human understanding, which a worldview seeks to explain.

### ***Cosmology – Understanding the Nature of our Universe***

Traditional thinking believes in the cosmos, or whole universe, as a closed, fixed, and unchangeable system, which is too sacred to work on, or develop. That view needs to change towards seeing the cosmos as open, full of potential for development, and natural, not sacred. Thus, we can study, explore, and creatively improve the material world and its parts. The world is not “necessary”, or fixed and unchangeable, but “contingent”, or able to be changed by the free decisions of humans making choices about how to work with the resources and materials in the physical world. We can use human powers for the ongoing good of the planet, or we can exploit and spoil our environment.

### ***Epistemology – How We Can Know What is Real***

We also need to change the way we think humans gain access to proper understanding and power to make changes and improvements in our world. This does not come through magical beliefs and religious rituals, nor through using special words in magical ways, and repeating fixed practices, to influence the spirit powers.<sup>8</sup> Rather, the way to proper understanding of the physical world is by using the lessons of science and technology; and to

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<sup>7</sup> Harold W. Turner, “The Relationship between Development and New Religious Movements in the Primal Societies of the Third World”, in Frederick Ferre, and Rita Mataragnon, eds, *God and Global Justice: Religion and Poverty in an Unequal World*, New York NY: Paragon House New Era Books, 1985, pp. 84-110.

<sup>8</sup> Don McGregor explained and illustrated that this was the way Papua New Guineans traditionally thought, in his important paper, “New Guinea Basic Assumptions”, the revised form of a Paper he prepared for the 1966 Christian Missions in Many Lands Annual Brethren Missionary Conference at Anguganak, PNG, August 1966: see Assumption Three, pp, 4-11.

understand and relate to the spiritual world, we follow faith and obedience to God's revelation in the scriptures.

***Eschatology – Understanding Time and its Meaning***

To understand time, we need to add to the traditions and myths, which have come from the ancestors, a clear grasp of the progress of history, and a sense of meaning and movement towards a final goal, as an essential context for our human story.

***Sociology – Understanding How People Relate to Each Other***

The primal worldview needs to move from the old way of understanding society as made up of a single, closed, and sacred set of relationships in extended families, clans, and tribes, with fixed cultures, with each tribe sure they were inherently better than others.<sup>9</sup> We need to move to understand society as open to change, with many different patterns of belief and relationships, and as secular, not too special or sacred to change. So, new social relationships with people from other clans, tribes, religions, and cultures are both possible and to be accepted.

***Ethics and Morality – Understanding the Reasons for Right and Wrong***

Our understanding must no longer think that evil is just something outside us, coming from spirit beings, or from the environment.<sup>10</sup> Rather, we should understand evil is also present in us internally as human beings. Our own choices and desires are often the source of evil, selfishness, greed, and deceit. Moreover, we do not become evil, or unclean, or polluted, because we did not observe some laws and rituals in the right way. No, evil is a moral reality, which comes from our wrong choices and actions as responsible humans.

Changes in these five kinds of thinking take time. But they are important if we want to grasp how business works in the global world of today. The

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<sup>9</sup> Don McGregor explains this point as the first "Assumption" in his paper referred to in the previous footnote, pp. 2-3.

<sup>10</sup> Again, this belief is illustrated in Don McGregor's explanation of Assumption Three, pp 5-9.

biblical teachings, we have set out above, form the basis for changes at this worldview level of understanding.

### **CONCLUSION**

These are some of the basic biblical foundations, and new patterns of understanding, we need to share in a previously-primal society like Papua New Guinea. This is the way to lay the worldview-level foundations for Christian involvement in business, commerce, and industry. These Christian values and assumptions have deeply and richly informed and shaped Western culture, and the whole global economic scene over the past 400 years. But attempts in our world today to retain the fruit of the Christian gospel, without any commitment to their roots in that gospel, is one of the biggest concerns in the Western world today. We need to keep both the roots and the fruit alive, in fostering new business ventures in PNG.

Let me conclude with a personal story. In 1978, a Christian businessman friend of ours, Heaton Drake, from Nelson, New Zealand, was at the Christian Leaders' Training College in PNG. He was auditing the College books before the Annual College meetings. As we talked, he surprised me by saying, "John, I love making money". When he saw the shock on my face, showing I wondered what he meant, he smiled and went on, "I love making money, so that I can give it away, and help others in God's service". Then, we went on to talk about the need for money to help God's work in PNG. Later that same visit, Heaton offered fees and fares for me to go to the other side of the world, to Aberdeen University in Scotland, to study the history of Christian mission in the Pacific, and to complete PhD study. Our family's whole service for Christ from that time was changed and enriched through Heaton's generosity. Even when Heaton was tragically killed in a work accident two years later, he had made arrangements so that the fees and fares my family and I needed to complete the PhD were still available. We owe a huge debt of thanks to this man who "loved making money", for the right reasons. He was also behind the *Bia Mogo Bulene* business venture at Koroba.

Our prayer is that many Papua New Guinea Christians will rise up to become Christian business people, who manage their businesses well, so

that, like Heaton Drake, they, too, can serve God faithfully through making money, and using it well for God’s glory.

**APPENDIX: TWO CONTRASTING PATTERNS OF BUSINESS**

To show the contrasts, we set out our description of the features of each as a diagram:<sup>11</sup>

A socially-embedded, gift- and relationship-based <i>wantok</i> economy/business	The key feature of the business being compared	A geographically-extending, commodity- and capital-based, market economy/business
Strong roots in a particular social group of <i>wantoks</i> – “embedded” in their culture and customs	<b>Its location and who works for it</b>	Based in a particular place, but employees may be from many backgrounds, and it can reach from local to regional, to national and, perhaps, international markets.
What it “buys and sells”, or exchanges, are thought of as gifts. They carry relational meanings, the sellers always feel they still own part of what was sold.	<b>Nature of what is traded</b>	What it “buys and sells” are thought of as commodities: once traded, they no longer belong to the seller, but become the property of the buyer alone.

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<sup>11</sup> Some of the ideas in the chart were suggested by the content and diagrams in the article by George N. Curry and Gina Koczberski, “Relational Economics, Social Embeddedness, and Valuing Labour in Agrarian Change: An Example from the Developing World”, *Geographical Research* 50-4 (November 2012), pp. 377-392. They investigated Oil Palm farming on New Britain, PNG.

<p>Selling, or giving and receiving, the gift builds a ongoing, reciprocal relationship between the seller/giver and buyer/receiver. These social implications are an important part of the purpose of the business.</p>	<p><b>Expectations created by the sale</b></p>	<p>The buyer and seller have no further necessary relationship, once the sale is complete. Any social implications of the business are regarded as secondary, not part of the sale.</p>
<p>The seller/giver can expect some future return from selling the gift. The receiver/buyer has a responsibility to (later) make a return to the giver/seller of similar value</p>	<p><b>Expectations: for seller . . . for receiver</b></p>	<p>When an agreed price is paid that is the end of the transaction, with no further expectations or obligations between the seller/giver and buyer /receiver.</p>
<p><i>Wantoks</i> contribute time, labour, skills/knowledge, or loan goods, or money for the business. The business makes some immediate payment for those services, based on generosity of the boss, and status or needs of the contributor, not on the amount or value of the work done. Also, the business or boss has a continuing obligation to “pay-back” equivalent goods to the contributors later.</p>	<p><b>How workers are paid</b></p>	<p>Employees contract to contribute time, labour, skills/knowledge, experience, or to invest goods or money into the business for an agreed period of time. The contract sets an agreed, fair price to be paid in wages and allowances (or salaries). Once the contract ends, there is no further obligation on the employer or the employee.</p>
<p>Everything the employers and the contributors do together is thought of as part of the <i>wantok</i> relationship, so everything the <i>wantoks</i> do is related, to some extent, to the business.</p>	<p><b>How the sale relates to the rest of life</b></p>	<p>The buyer and seller may also become friends, and do other things together, away from the business, but these are not thought of as part of the business agreement.</p>



<p>Whatever the contributor gives to the business is valued on the basis of how it builds up the social relationships of the <i>wantok</i> group rather than what it cost the contributor to give it.</p>	<p><b>How work and skills are valued</b></p>	<p>Time, skills, experience, education, knowledge, tools, materials, and everything a person uses in the business has a monetary value, which is added in when working out each employee's pay, or allowances, or salary, for their contribution to the business.</p>
<p>Income from the business goes into the common pool of resources of the <i>wantok</i> group, and can be used for whatever is the pressing need of the moment within the <i>wantok</i> network.</p> <p>Those who benefit from such distributions have an obligation to make further contributions to the business at some later time, when the business needs come to the top of the <i>wantok</i> priority list.</p>	<p><b>How income is handled</b></p>	<p>Income is marked to pay for particular costs of business operation, and goes into designated accounts, to be used only for that purpose. Funds needed to run the business (operational income and expenditure), and to develop the business (capital income and expenditure), have to be met before any income is regarded as profit. All the costs for running and developing the business are included in the "budget". Only payments agreed to in the budget can be paid quickly. Funds cannot be taken from one designated account to cover needs in another account, unless a way of repaying the "loan" has been agreed.</p>

<p>Different traditional “accounting” systems may be used. The tribal leaders, or headmen, of the <i>wantok</i> group often carry the “memory” of who owes what to whom. Other <i>wantok</i> leaders can argue or contest the decisions of the headmen. <i>Wantok</i> leaders can put heavy pressures on the business managers to distribute income to meet their priorities. Money for long-term budget needs, and capital to develop the business, are sometimes spent to meet the immediate demands, causing difficulties for the business. Community memory fill the role, which detailed budgets, and financial accounts and reports, fill in other systems. Traditionally, these were not written down. A person’s status in the <i>wantok</i> network gives authority to make demands on the business income, whether or not they contribute equitably to its operation.</p>	<p><b>Kinds of “accounting” followed</b></p>	<p>Only the people with authority in the business can approve payments, or disbursing of income. They have to keep the finances within the agreed budget, and give a full account of all income and expenditure. These financial reports are checked regularly by the manager(s), the Board, and an outside auditor, to make sure nothing is being used wrongly. Setting aside income for investment in professional development of staff, for maintenance and improvement of equipment and tools, and for capital development and expansion need careful control, planning, and reporting.</p>
<p><i>Wantok</i> businesses work best in the kinds of setting where most adult members of the community have the required skills and experience for doing the business well. Where most adults in the <i>wantok</i> group can contribute similarly to a</p>	<p><b>Where each kind of business works best</b></p>	<p>Complex businesses, needing a range of specialised expertise, diverse tools, knowledge, equipment, and materials need these specialised financial accounting systems to keep track of operational expenditure, operational</p>

<p>project, and where there is widely-shared knowledge of what the business requires, the system works well. Traditional subsistence farming in rural communities, and cash cropping, or agricultural ventures, with local distribution of goods and services, can work well under this system.</p>		<p>performance, and forward planning.</p> <p>When the business is supplying goods for international markets, then international accounting standards must be met.</p>
<p><i>Wantok</i> businesses usually show good care and respect for their workers or contributors, as they value their contribution to the <i>wantok</i> network. Usually, members of the <i>wantok</i> group are given preference in job opportunities, or promotions. Loyalty to the business is expected, and assistance with other non-work-related needs is often given for those in the <i>wantok</i> network. They seldom provide secure work positions for non-members of the <i>wantok</i> group.</p>	<p><b>How staff are looked after</b></p>	<p>Wise market businesses regard their employees as their most valuable asset, and provide good human relations care and support for them while in the workplace. Employees cannot always expect support or assistance for needs outside the workplace, such as family, or general health needs. But practices vary, and Christian businesses may include health insurance, or other assistance, in their employment contracts. These businesses expect loyalty from employees, as long as they are employed, but they are free to change loyalties when a contract ends.</p>

<p>The goals of the business, and the use of profits are normally all focussed on building up the social relationships within the <i>wantok</i> network. This kind of business finds it hard to contribute to wider community, regional, or more general needs of other particular groups in the community, unless there is strong leadership from headmen. Since <i>wantok</i> membership is restricted, those outside the <i>wantok</i> network are not likely to benefit from the business.</p>	<p><b>Goals of the business and the use of profit</b></p>	<p>The goals of this kind of business are normally primarily financial – to improve the financial wealth of the shareholders of the company. The company charter can include a requirement to meet specified social or community obligations by designating a proportion of the final profit for this purpose. Or, the shareholders themselves may be expected to personally meet those societal needs, through their own giving from their income from the company. Such companies can be accused of just building up the personal wealth of the shareholders, or they can become known for encouraging Christian business people to give generously to meet the social and spiritual needs of their societies.</p>
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*Question:* Another, third, business model is a cooperative, which combines aspects of both these models. Would a cooperative work if its members are not already sharing in other *wantok* relationships?

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