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MELANESIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

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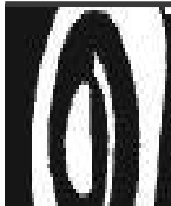
Summary Article

**Helping Youth of the Ghatapa Association
of the South Sea Evangelical Church
Understand their Familial Identity in Christ
in the Midst of Changes Brought on by Globalisation**

Celestial Prasad Yejerla



Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools



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EDITORIAL

Long-term readers of the *Melanesian Journal of Theology* will notice some changes in this latest issue. Apart from formatting changes, most of the articles (see the final paragraph below on so-called “summary articles”) in both numbers of the journal published in 2016 will have gone through a process of anonymous peer review. The reasons for moving to a peer-review process are two-fold: to improve the academic quality of articles published in the journal; and to familiarise faculty members of theological schools in Melanesia (and the wider Pacific) with the usual process of scholarly publication. As theological faculty become research active, the hope is that this will contribute in turn to improvements in theological education and its end product, ministers of the gospel. This goal should not, however, be interpreted in an exclusive sense. The journal welcomes article submissions from any person/s with an interest in Melanesia, its churches, and people.

In this issue Thomas Davai Jr. examines what he terms the “triangle of *ghora* killing” in the Rigo inland of the Central Province of Papua New Guinea. After noting that attitudes towards sorcery killing in PNG are ambivalent, he argues that satanic power lies behind all sorcery, regardless of whether it has evil or good intentions or outcomes. Davai bases his argument on an analysis of select biblical data, including observed similarities between the characteristics of demons in the Bible and those of *ghoras* in the Rigo inland. In light of this, he finds that his church’s response to sorcery has moderated and urges a return to the strong advocacy of the past. While the focus is quite narrow in that it is restricted to the Rigo inland, the observations made in the article should have wider applicability to similar situations in other parts of PNG.

In the second article Ma’afu Palu sets out to build a theological foundation for a gospel-centred contextualisation model which can be used to address contemporary issues in Melanesia and the wider Pacific. He argues that hearing the Bible as the voice of God is essential to a gospel response by Pacific theologians and, in the process, rejects all other approaches to biblical interpretation. For Palu, the sinful human heart is the source of all contemporary problems and, therefore, the cross of Jesus Christ is the solution. A second crucial point of departure is the understanding that Pacific cultures are “gentile” and, therefore, unable to access the blessings promised

to Israel. Drawing on the ideas of a number of modern theologians and biblical scholars, Palu asserts that if the peoples of the Pacific are to be partakers of the promises to Israel, they must enter the strange new world of the Bible by faith in Jesus Christ and allow it to re-describe and re-configure the realities of their lives.

Although my own contribution approaches the biblical text from a different perspective, it arrives at a similar conclusion in asking whether the churches of Melanesia are willing to allow the counter-cultural teaching of Jesus to inform their ministry practice and theological education. From the standpoint of ancient Mediterranean culture, the Sermon on the Mount contains a profound critique of the defining principles of honour-shame cultures. The unequivocal demands of culture – the obligatory pursuit and defence of honour and the overriding need to avoid shame at any cost – are to be entirely renounced. Thus, Jesus issues an extraordinary challenge to what I have termed “cultural Christianity” in Melanesia.

Finally, while the journal will no longer be publishing complete master’s theses (because most are far too long and contain a lot of repetition and/or reiteration), it will continue to make available student research in summary form. Students will be asked to identify the key components of their argument and to edit and, where necessary, rewrite their thesis so that the published “summary article” can stand on its own as a piece of work and not require the reader of the journal to access the thesis itself. This is a valuable exercise that will help recent graduates to understand, at least to some extent, what is involved in writing a journal article. Since the thesis on which each summary article is based will have gone through an academic examination process, the resultant “article” will not have been peer reviewed. Celestial Prasad Yejerla’s offering is the first of these summary articles which will be published in a separate section in the back of each issue.

Scott D. Charlesworth
Editor



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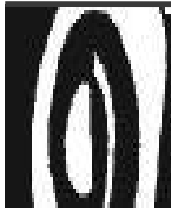
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THE TRIANGLE OF *GHORA* KILLING IN RIGO INLAND IN THE CENTRAL PROVINCE OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA: A BIBLICAL RESPONSE

Thomas Davai Jr.

Pacific Adventist University, Port Moresby

Abstract

Ghora killing in the Rigo inland of the Central Province of Papua New Guinea is a deeply rooted spiritual problem. Out of hatred or jealousy people engage the services of a *ghora* to kill people through supernatural means. A person must go through vigorous physical and ritualistic training to become a *ghora*. Others train to become *babaraus* to bring justice to those who suffer from *ghora* killing. But, whether they bring harm or justice, the Bible is clear that both *ghoras* and *babaraus* are empowered by the same source – satanic demons – with whom they share many characteristics. Three case studies discuss the various community responses (*wui-ita*, *karva-ghabi*, and *toe-yawa*) to the problem of *ghora* killing from the 1930s to the early 2000s. Two of these solutions were condemned by early and later Seventh-day Adventist missionaries as satanic in nature because the sources used to counter *ghora* killing were the same sources the *ghoras* used. However, the latest practice, *toe-yawa*, has not been condemned. God-fearing Christians in the Rigo inland are challenged to rekindle the strong advocacy of the early and later Seventh-day Adventist missionaries against all uses of satanic power.

Keywords

Sorcery, Rigo inland, *ghora*, *babarau*, *wui-ita*, *karva-ghabi*, *toe-yawa*, biblical response, Satan, demons

INTRODUCTION

I suspect that more has been written about sorcery in Papua New Guinea (PNG) than any other topic. But all of this attention has only reinforced a general ambivalence towards sorcery killing. The present article seeks to address this ambivalence by arguing that the source from which sorcerers attain their extraordinary powers to kill people through various forms of ritual

is Satan and his demons. To seek after, listen to, or engage with these satanic sources is contrary to Christianity. Sorcerers are ordinary people who possess extraordinary powers because Satan and his demons control and empower them. Thus, sorcery practices are dangerous and undermine the authority of the God of heaven. This inquiry uses the term *ghora* in place of “sorcery” because the use of the word *ghora* emphasizes the real source of sorcery powers and helps to avoid preconceived misconceptions about sorcery killing.

The article is divided into four parts. The first part is a non-exhaustive review of previous works on sorcery in PNG. The second discusses the nature of *ghora* practice in the Rigo inland and how the *ghoras* and *babaraus* become major players in *ghora* killing. The third part uses biblical comparisons to discuss *ghoras* and *babaraus* in relation to satanic demons. Finally, the conclusion makes several recommendations.

PREVIOUS WORKS

Since “*ghora* killing” is related to “sorcery killing,” a brief survey of general works on sorcery will be helpful. There has been an increase in attempts to discuss sorcery in PNG over the last 20 years. The following is not an exhaustive list, but a survey of a few selected works.

John Baker correctly observes that sorcery still “remains a living reality” in PNG and that early missionaries have shaped people’s thinking toward sorcery.¹ Although his focus is the Maisin people, Baker’s observations are applicable to all of the cultures of PNG.

According to Naomi M. McPherson, sorcery is defined as a form of “esoteric knowledge bestowing personal power.”² McPherson acknowledges that people become sorcerers because they obtain mysterious supernatural powers. But what is not mentioned is the fact that sorcerers get assistance from powers beyond themselves. What these powers are and from where they come will be a matter for discussion in this article.

Andrew Lattas does not individualise sorcery by treating it as an “illness specific to individual circumstances.” Rather he explores the way “colonialism and development in themselves are being criticised through

¹ J. Baker, “Encounters with Evil: Christianity and the Response to Sorcery Among the Maisin of Papua New Guinea,” *Oceania* 6 (1990): 152 (139-155).

² N.M. McPherson, “A Question of Morality: Sorcery and Concepts of Deviance among the Kabana, West New Britain,” *Anthropologica* 33 (1991): 132 (127-143).

sorcery accusations.”³ In other words, Lattas says that sorcery reflects the “inequalities and conflicts which the white man’s institutions,” such as education, cash cropping, government, and missions bring.

Bruce Kapferer proposes that sorcery is the “magical additional force that unites with the intentional direction of human beings into their realities – a creative destructive directionality.”⁴ Again, where this additional force comes from is overlooked.

Allen Jones, in his findings on sorcery among the Mekeo people, observes that the act of sorcery is “ruthless” and “deliberate” in destroying others.⁵ Finally, Andrew Strathern and Pamela J. Stewart relate Papua New Guinean sorcery to sickness, death and sister-exchanges in marriage.⁶

What is lacking in these works is that, although most of the authors acknowledge that sorcery is a magical force, not one of them goes on to explore the *source* of these powers. In addition, this brief review shows that the term “sorcery” can have various meanings attached to it which do not address the core issue of the source of sorcery powers.

THE NATURE OF *GHORA* PRACTICE IN RIGO INLAND

Ghora in the Rigo language is a noun which refers to a group of demon-possessed men who are hired to kill people in a supernatural way. It also functions as a verb to describe the practice of supernatural killing. The *ghoras*’ attain their knowledge and power through ritualistic training at very isolated places in the jungle. There are four stages in which *ghora* power is attained.

- The first stage is *ghani-gabu*. At this stage trainees eat special leaves with ginger and burnt bananas for two months without drinking or washing. During this first stage they also memorise magical words received from the dead ancestors through their instructors.

³ A. Lattas, “Sorcery and Colonialism: Illness, Dreams, and Death as Political Languages in West New Britain,” *Man* 28 (1993): 53 (51-77).

⁴ B. Kapferer, “Sorcery, Modernity and the Constitutive Imagery: Hybridising Continuities,” *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 46 (2002): 105 (105-128).

⁵ A.A. Jones, “Mekeo Chiefs and Sorcerers: Metaphor, Ideology, and Practice,” *Oceania* 77 (2007): 294 (286-312).

⁶ A. Strathern and P.J. Stewart, “Sorcery and Sister Exchange: Comparative Comments,” *Journal of Ritual Studies* 23 (2009): 61-63.

- If the trainees pass the first stage, the instructor then takes them to a place filled with black carpenter ants. It is believed that the ancestral powers are inherited through these ants. The more the ants bite the trainees, the more the ancestral powers they receive. Giving up in this second stage is seen as disrespectful to the ancestral spirits. The consequence of backing away at this stage is expulsion and the trainee will be haunted by the ancestral spirits.
- After two weeks of recovery, the instructors then take the trainees to beehives where they are bitten as a test of endurance. They are told that they have come too far to give up.
- The final stage is the most challenging. The trainee *ghoras* have to play a leading role in having a family member killed in order to graduate at the highest level. Most trainees fail at this stage. Only a few strong-hearted ones get through.

Some people, for reasons known only to themselves, but usually out of hatred, jealousy, greed, or to pay someone back, plan to have other people killed. To avoid legal prosecution, imprisonment, or possible physical retaliation, *ghoras* are engaged to do the job because there will be no physical evidence to verify their actions.

Ghoro killing in Rigo inland⁷ operates in a triangular mode which involves ordinary human beings and the *ghoras*. Engaging the services of *ghoras* requires a cash payment along with the name(s) of the victim(s). Upon receiving the cash and the name, the process of *nubo* begins. *Nubo* is a *ghoro* ritual process of having the victim make himself or herself available to be killed. The process includes pulling special roots while chanting the name of the victim, the breaking of sacred stones, and placing the written name of the victim on the crushed stones and wrapping it with a special leaf (only known to *ghoras*). This ritual is done a couple of times over a month. It is the opposite of praying for someone over a month for God to work in his or her life. *Nubo* is a process of meditation and praying to the ancestors to make the victim ready for killing.

In the process of doing *nubo* the *ghoras* may also want to do *ghani-gabu* as an extra ritual from a recent grave(s) in preparation for the killing to take

⁷ The term “Rigo inland” refers to the Boku area which includes Orman River villages in the Central Province of Papua New Guinea.

place. *Ghani-gabu*, in the original sense, is the diet of the people undergoing *ghora* training. *Ghani* is “to eat” and *gabu* is “to burn.” So, *ghani-gabu* is eating burnt food from the fire without drinking water for the duration of the *ghora* training which can take two to three months. However, the term also refers to the practice by graduated and practising *ghoras* to get more *power* by digging up coffins from recent grave(s), opening them, rubbing food items over the corpse, and eating the food. They then rebury the corpse. By doing that they believe that the ancestral spirits provide them with extra power to carry out the task.

After a month of doing *nubo* the victim is now ready and becomes *mage* or “ripe”. This period is indicated in the following ways: (1) the targeted victim becomes unsettled, always wandering about alone; (2) a “death smell” comes from their bodies, but only the *ghoras*, not ordinary people, can smell it; (3) there is a feeling like a magnetic pull, so that the victims always wants to be where the *ghoras* are.

When the time comes for the killing, the *ghoras* may attack at a convenient time and place. When the victim is ambushed, the *ghoras* who are specialised in killing attack the victim with the *apeta*. *Apeta* is a special weapon made of strong wood shaped like a canoe paddle used by the ancestors when at war with tribal enemies. This *apeta* is used by the *ghoras* to kill victims by bashing them to death.

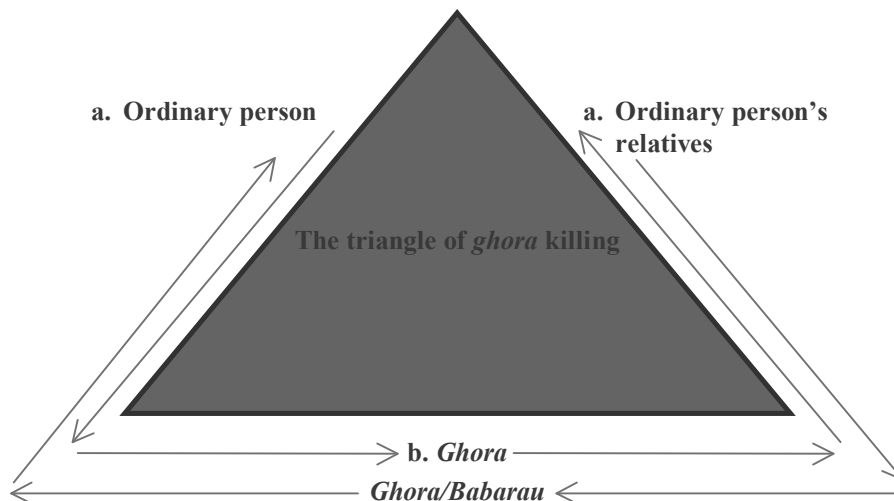
A second group of *ghoras* who are specialised in resuscitation then follow a process of reviving the dead by rubbing special leaves and roots over the body and speaking the unconscious victim back into consciousness. After that, the *ghoras* direct the victim to die in a certain way, at a certain time and location, and they send the victim away. For example, *ghoras* tell the victim to fall from a coconut tree, to drown, to be attacked and eaten by a crocodile, or to die through a car accident, etc. When the victim dies, days or weeks later, according to the directions of the *ghoras*, another turn in the triangular mode of *ghora* killing takes place.

The relatives of the victim seek answers for the cause of death. The answer lies in the *babarau*. *Babarau* is a word in Motu (a common language among Papuans) which describes a person who has a supernatural ability to: (1) save victims who are in the “ripe” period; (2) reveal the identities of *ghoras* and those who hired them (traitors); (3) provide answers for the cause of death or sickness; (4) heal people from sickness; (5) provide security from

threat. In the case of relatives seeking answers for the cause of death, the *babaraus* provide clues and disclose identities.

Upon learning the identities of the killers, the relatives hire other *ghoras* to provide payback. However, these newly-hired *ghoras* cannot kill other *ghoras* because they have the same powers and they do things together. Instead they go after the traitor(s) who had earlier planned for the death of the person. If the hired *ghoras* are unable to kill the traitor(s), they turn on the traitor's innocent family members.

This triangular mode of *ghora* killing sets the *ghoras* and *babaraus* on centre stage where they become main players, while the common people, who use their services, hide behind them. However, they are rivals because the *babaraus* reveal the identities and the actions of the *ghoras*. Both *ghoras* and *babaraus* become the most powerful, respected, and feared people in the community. Below is an illustration of the triangular nature of *ghora* killing.



BIBLICAL COMPARISONS AND RESPONSES

Compared to God, human beings are limited in all aspects of life. This is because humans are part of the material world created by God (Gen 1, 2). Humans are seen as a little lower than the angels, but crowned with glory and

honour (Ps 8). This means that humans, though uniquely created in God's image, cannot function like angels or God. Although humans are God's agents ruling over and caring for the earth (Gen 1:27), they do not possess godly powers.⁸

However, like Eve in the garden (Gen 3), some people desire to possess secret knowledge and power. In the case of *ghoras* and *babaraus*, their attainment of secret knowledge and power is very satanic in nature. Therefore, they are rivals to God and become hostile to ordinary people. They are human beings endowed with more than human knowledge. In other words, *ghoras* who kill others have some form of higher knowledge, since they are possessed or controlled by powers other than God. It is not hard to find such examples in scripture: the daughter of the Phoenician woman possessed by demons (Mark 7:24-30); and a mute boy who was also possessed by demons (Mark 9:17-29). According to Merrill Unger, sorcerers (*ghoras* included) recklessly flirt with demonism.⁹

Both the *ghoras* who kill and *babaraus* who heal and reveal are under Satan's rule and control. The demons, as subjects and helpers of Satan (Matt 24:26), empower the *ghoras* to kill. Likewise, the demons empower the *babaraus* to heal, reveal, and to protect. The demons with whom the *ghoras* and *babaraus* liaise are also well organised and able to interact with people's culture and the modern world of science (see Matt 12:24).

Below is a table, which shows the similarity of demons to *ghoras* and *babaraus*. The basic lie of Satan through the serpent in the Garden of Eden – that humans could become like God in knowledge and yet not die – seems to be “validated” by the god-like characteristics of *ghora* and *babarau* in the Rigo inland today.¹⁰

⁸ R.L. Harris, *Man: God's Eternal Creation: Old Testament Teaching on Man and His Culture* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), 7.

⁹ M.F. Unger, *Demons in the World Today: a Study of Occultism in the Light of God's Word* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1971), 11.

¹⁰ D.E. Mansell, *The Mystery of Consciousness* (Boise: Pacific Press, 1988), 65.

Demons	<i>Ghoras</i> and <i>babaraus</i>
Demons are powerful, supernatural beings (Rev 16:14).	<i>Ghoras</i> and <i>babaraus</i> have special powers.
The demons can inflict sickness (Matt 9:32-33).	<i>Ghoras</i> inflict sickness through <i>nubo</i> . <i>Babaraus</i> can inflict sickness on others.
Demons can control animals (Mark 5:13).	<i>Ghoras</i> can control and use animals, such as snakes and crocodiles, to kill victims.
Demons can possess or control human beings (Luke 8:2).	<i>Ghoras</i> control victims through <i>nubo</i> and direct their death. <i>Babaraus</i> lure people into believing them.
Demons can cause mental disorder (Mark 5:2-3, 5).	<i>Ghoras</i> themselves do not respect human life. They are disorderly in their thinking. They cause mental disorder through <i>nubo</i> .
Demons are afraid of God (Jas 2:19).	<i>Ghoras</i> and <i>babaraus</i> do not attend church. They are also afraid of religious people, especially pastors.
Demons oppose God's people (Eph 6:12)	<i>Ghoras</i> destroy people who have been created in the image of God.
Demons teach false doctrine (1 Tim 4:1).	<i>Ghoras</i> and <i>babaraus</i> lie to people.
God is going to judge demons at the last judgment (2 Pet 2:4).	God is going to judge <i>ghoras</i> and <i>babaraus</i> at the last judgment.

In the book of Exodus, for instance, Egyptian magicians imitated by magic the miracles of God. When Moses told Aaron to throw his staff down, it turned into a snake. Pharaoh's wise men and sorcerer's did the same thing and their staves also turned into snakes (Ex 7:8-12). From outside, they looked identical. The difference was that Moses acted at the command of God (v. 8), and the magicians acted in opposition to God through their secret arts (v. 11).

Likewise, the *babaraus* reveal, heal, and assist people in response to their needs, but at the commands of the demons. Similarly, the *ghoras* provide a service by killing people through the power of sources other than God. In both instances, *ghoras* and *babaraus* deal with the same forces, the demons. In the

triangular mode of *ghora* killing in Rigo inland, *ghoras* consult Satan through various rituals to provoke the demons into action. The *babaraus* consult the same demons to do “good” to people.

1. Community Solutions and Church Responses

Ghora killing and *babarau* responses in the Rigo inland are ongoing problems that require a response from men and women who fear God. Such godly men and women need to encounter *ghora* killing with the Word of God. For the scriptures show that God can directly intervene in any circumstance when his people suffer through subjection to demonic powers (see Dan 3, 6-12; Matt 24-27; Ezek 37-39). But before coming to the biblical data, this section looks at the various community solutions that have been applied to *ghora* killing in the Rigo inland.

(a) Case Study 1

Between the 1930s and the 1950s the method used to deal with *ghora* killing was *wui-ita* (hair proving). The community would go to the cemetery and call upon ancestors to come out and drop handfuls of human hair (similar to the *ghoras* and their agents). The relatives would watch from their hiding places as the spirits of the ancestors came out of their graves and dropped handfuls of human hair on certain locations. The relatives would then study the hair carefully and try to make links to people with a similar hair type. The leaders would have all the villagers come forward and they would compare their hair with the hair provided by the ancestral spirits. Someone in the crowd would eventually admit guilt.

The *wui-ita* method was condemned as satanic by the early Seventh-day Adventist missionaries to Rigo inland. The missionaries confronted this evil practice with the Bible teaching that the ancestors were long dead and their rising up and communicating with relatives was not possible because dead people are truly dead and, therefore, unable to appear or to communicate (2 Sam 12:23; Eccl 12:7). They concluded that it was the satanic demons that transformed themselves and communicated with the people. The villagers, upon receiving the Word of God from the missionaries, understood that the “ancestral spirits” were demons in the form of ancestors. *Wui-ita* eventually died out, but *ghora* killing continued.

(b) Case Study 2

Between the 1950s and the 1970s, the *karva-ghabi* (holding the fire) practice emerged. This came about because *ghora* killing continued and resulted in people blaming each other and becoming suspicious toward one another. As a result, relationships within communities were destroyed. Therefore, *karva-ghabi* became a standard form of verifying evidence of *ghora* killing.

In *karva-ghabi*, a piece of burning wood would be placed in the palm of the corpse and certain people would mumble sacred words into the corpse's ears to identify the location of the *ghoras* and the traitors(s) by flying a light across the sky toward the direction of the traitor(s) village. People would watch with anticipation as the firelight would continuously sparkle toward the direction of the *ghoras* and the traitors. That would provide the needed evidence. So, the relatives of the deceased would try to bring payback through other means of magic.

This method was again condemned by later Seventh-day Adventist missionaries. In the *karva-ghabi* practice, the later missionaries preached and taught that the demons were the ones who flew the light across the sky. Because of the missionaries' strong advocacy against the practice, people began to realise that Satan was behind this. The more people accepted the Word of God, the less people engaged in this activity. As a result, the *karva-ghabi* practice died out, but *ghora* killing continued.

(c) Case Study 3

In the late 1990s and early 2000s more young people in the Rigo inland were drafted into *ghora* practice and *ghora* killing spiralled out of control. There were merciless killings with no regard for human life. This caused much frustration among the general public. As a result, a group of individuals invented *toe-yawa* with the help of the ancestral spirits. This form of magic was designed to have traitors and *ghoras* killed. Those who invented this magic spent months pleading with the dead ancestors to show them ways to eradicate traitors and *ghoras*.

Toe-yawa involves a special mixture of magical leaves and magical words given by the ancestors. These leaves are placed in the coffin box secretly before burial and words provided by the ancestral spirits are spoken. After burial and for some time the corpse decays. As decay takes place the traitors and the *ghoras* involved in the killing get sick and die immediately.

In the past ten years many *ghoras* have died through this mode of payback and the existing *ghoras* now see *toe-yawa* as a direct threat. That has minimised *ghora* activity for the past five years. Meanwhile, the people see it as a successful security measure and a mode of payback to get even with ruthless *ghoras* and traitors. People like it because the payback does not involve physical retaliation or confrontation. As a result, Seventh-day Adventist community leaders, church leaders, and church members support it. A few church leaders and many members use *toe-yawa* magic as a security measure.

There is no clear opposition to it because of frustration about what the *ghoras* are doing in causing pain, loss, failure, sickness, madness, and death. The *ghoras* deprive their fellow humans of achieving or attaining their full potential. Rigo inland people tend to use *toe-yawa* and *babarau* for retaliation and both are thought of as means of bringing justice to people.

Also, this is seen as a preventative measure for those people who hire *ghoras*, and as a way of minimising *ghora* activity in the Rigo inland area. But *ghora* killing still takes place since there are loopholes of which the *ghoras* can take advantage.

The three case studies have shown ways in which Rigo inland people have tried to bring solutions to the age-old practice of *ghora* killing and to stop oppression. The traditional intention to bring peace, security, and freedom from the *ghoras* was and is good. Unfortunately, the *source* of these solutions, which are intended to bring justice, is the same source the *ghoras* use: the satanic demons who are rivals to the God of heaven.

2. The Old Testament Response

A possible biblical solution comes into play when the sources of power acquired by *ghoras*, *babaraus*, and *toe-yawa* are questioned. Two questions need to be answered from a biblical solution perspective: (1) what does the Bible have to say about sorcery; and (2) who are the ancestral spirits and from where do they come?

In the Old Testament all magical arts were distinctly prohibited on penalty of death under Mosaic law. God's attitude toward sorcery is bluntly stated in Exodus 22:18, "You shall not suffer a witch to live." According to Leviticus 19:26-28 and 19:31, God's people were not allowed to practice divination or soothsaying, or to turn to mediums or spiritualists. In Deuteronomy 18:10-11,

God's people were commanded not to learn the "abominations" of the people of the promised land such as child sacrifice, divination or sorcery, and they were not to interpret Oman, engage in witchcraft, cast spells, or turn to spiritualists/mediums who consulted the dead. Necromancy or talking to the dead was forbidden because it challenged the concept of prophecy with Yahweh as the one and only true source of "divination" as outlined in Deuteronomy 18:9-22.

When God did not respond positively to Saul because of his wickedness, instead of searching his own heart Saul attempted to obtain a revelation of the future from an ungodly source (1 Sam 28:8). At night and in disguise, he turned to a witch, an ungodly medium or spiritualist condemned as worthy of death by the Pentateuch. Saul's action in this case parallels the actions of *ghoras* and *babaraus* who seek ungodly sources, usually at night. Previously, Saul had driven the necromancers out of the land (v. 3), but in his desperation now found himself doing the exact opposite.¹¹

In v. 7 Saul commands his officers to seek a בּוֹאֵת־לַעֲבֹד תְּשֵׂא ("ghost wife" or "woman ventriloquist"; cf. Isa 29:4, "the one calling out from the earth", LXX). In other words, a woman who communicates with spirits of the deceased who are buried in the ground. The phrase "divine unto me by the familiar spirit" (KJV) in v. 8 would mean that Saul was seeking answers to his questions by using a witch to contact a departed or dead person. The woman describes her vision in the following way, "I saw gods (יְתִיאֵר בְּהֵלֵא) coming out of the [opening in the] earth like an old man (וְקִזּוֹ שֵׂיֵא) wrapped up in a robe (לִיעֲמֵג)" (vv. 13-14).

Smelik surveys various early answers to the question "did Samuel himself appear or not?"¹² First, Smelik observes that Philo did not deny that it was Samuel himself who appeared, and points out that Philo did not believe in necromancy. Second, Smelik refers to Pionius' remark that the rabbis considered necromancy to be wicked but possible, and taught that Samuel himself was raised at Endor. Third, Smelik observes that early Christian authors have three opinions: (1) that Samuel was resuscitated by the woman (Justin Martyr, Origen, Zeno of Verona, Ambrose, Augustine, Sulpicius

¹¹ See P.T. Reis, "Eating the Blood: Saul and the Witch of Endor," *Journal of the Study of the Old Testament* 22 (1997): 3-23.

¹² K.A.D. Smelik, "The Witch of Endor: 1 Samuel 28 in Rabbinic and Christian Exegesis till 800 AD," *Vigiliae Christianae* 33 (1979): 164-65 (160-79).

Severus, Dracontius, and Anastasius Sinaita); (2) either Samuel or a demon appeared in his shape at God's command (John Chrysostom, Theodoret of Cyrrhus, Pseudo-Justin, Theodore bar Koni, and Isho'dad of Merv); (3) a demon deceived Saul and gave him a forged prophecy (Tertullian, Pseudo-Hippolytus, Pionius, Eustathius of Antioch, Ephraem, Gregory of Nyssa, Evagrius Ponticus, Pseudo-Basil, Jerome, Philastrius, Ambrosiaster, and Pseudo-Augustine).

So which interpretation is correct? The witch of Endor is an older example of "talking to ancestral spirits" in Bible times. Some may argue that the disguised Saul asked the woman to bring up Samuel from the grave and the woman "saw Samuel" (v. 12) and not a demon in the shape of Samuel. However, the words the "woman saw Samuel" are not meant to be definitive. The reader will understand this "magic" of raising Samuel to be *delusive* because it is understood that the story is about the condemned practice of necromancy. The passage sets out to reiterate that seeking ungodly sources is wrong.

The historical books and prophets (see Isa 44:25; Jer 27:9; 29:8; Ezek 13:9; 21:21-23) also speak against such things. Jezebel, the wicked queen of the northern kingdom of Israel, was deeply involved in witchcraft and her "sorceries were many" (2 Kgs 9:22). Consequently, she died a violent death (vv. 33-35). King Manasseh of Judah practiced different kinds of occultism, including spiritualism and magical sorcery (2 Chron 33:6). God called these wicked deeds "abominations" and stated that Manasseh had done wickedly (2 Kgs 21:11).

God will not let sorcerers go unpunished indefinitely. When the Messiah, Israel's prince of peace returns (Mic 5:2-5), all "man-made religions with their sorcerers, diviners, idols, shrines, and cities devoted to idolatry will be destroyed (vv. 12-14). Malachi also refers to the removal of sorcery as part of future judgement at the Lord's return. The Lord will be "a swift witness against the sorcerers" (Mal 3:5). Finally, the profusion of sorcerers in both Egypt and Babylon along with the magicians and enchanters in Babylon is condemned throughout the Old Testament.¹³ This judgemental attitude of the Lord toward sorcery and its practitioners indicates that it has a defiling effect

¹³ R.B. Zuck, "The Practice of Witchcraft in the Scriptures", *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128 (1971): 352-60.

upon God's people. Complete removal of every trace of this terrible sin is necessary.

3. The New Testament Response

In the New Testament Peter spoke against Simon the sorcerer who tried to buy the power of God with money (Acts 8:9-25). Simon had gained a great following through his practice of sorcery (vv. 10, 12). People were amazed because of his magical arts (v. 9). However, on hearing the gospel message from Philip, Simon believed and was baptised. He was amazed when he saw that the miracles performed by Philip were far greater than his own (v. 13). This shows that God's power is superior to the power of demons.

On each of Paul's missionary journeys, he confronted some form of satanic power. On his first journey Paul condemned a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, who was also called Elymas, who tried to oppose the work of the apostles (Acts 13:6-12). Paul denounced Bar-Jesus with strong words saying "you are a child of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" (v. 10). In this denunciation, Paul indicates that every kind of sorcery is deceiving, satanic, the opposite of righteousness, and a spiritual perversion.¹⁴

It is also important to understand the source of *ghora* killing in light of the evil powers outlined in Ephesians 6:10-18.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take the whole armour of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; besides all these, taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints." (RSV)

¹⁴ Zuck, "The Practice of Witchcraft," 358.

Without hesitation, this is the clearest description in the New Testament of the ever present reality of spiritual warfare. Paul is in no doubt as regards the presence of evil principalities and powers.¹⁵ He asserts that God's people are in constant confrontation with evil forces. Collectively, the "spiritual hosts of wickedness" are in league with the *ghoras*, *babaraus*, and *toe-yawa* people discussed in this article. That is, these people are under the headship of Satan, the devil.¹⁶ The person who manifests behaviour like a *ghora*, *babarau*, or *toe-yawa* is to be understood as controlled and taken possession by an evil invisible power or being.

So, when Paul talks about wrestling with "principalities and powers," he speaks in a language that immediately resonates with people's struggle over *ghora* killing in the Rigo inland. According to Paul, believers are to clothe themselves with the spiritual armour only God can provide.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The issues involved in *ghora* killing are difficult for people to judge correctly because of the supernatural nature of these events. The *ghoras*, *babaraus*, and *toe-yawa* are always successful because their methods are empowered by supernatural forces and there is no physical evidence which can be traced. People in the Rigo inland need to understand that *ghoras* communicate with demons which allow them to further their ambition to dominate other people, animals, plants, and the material world. This enlargement of control is beyond the five senses. It is achievable because these demonic spirits are emissaries sent from Satan with personalities and the characteristics of intelligent beings. They hear, speak, see, think, know, and dwell in the human body in order to accomplish their evil purposes (Matt 12:43-45, Mark 1:23-24, Mark 3:11).

Ghoras, *babaraus*, and *toe-yawa* people who consult demons in a desire for power and payback are always hungry for new knowledge that will enable them to dominate nature. They become superhuman individuals and have a very powerful attraction for ordinary people. In Rigo inland the fear of misfortune and sickness is a major reason why many seek the protection and

¹⁵ C.E. Arnold., "The 'Exorcism' of Ephesians 6:12 in Recent Research: A Critique of Wesley Carr's View on the Role of the Evil Powers in First Century AD Belief," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 30 (1987): 71-87, esp. 71-79.

¹⁶ J.A. Adewuya, "The Spiritual Powers of Ephesians 6:10-18 in the Light of African Pentecostal Spirituality," in *Bulletin of Biblical Research* 22 (2012): 256 (251-58).

defence they long for from these individuals. But they only strengthen the people's trust in the devil.

Demon-controlled practices destroy the fabric of society through fear, hatred, payback, spiritual decline, and discomfort. Though these practices cannot be scientifically proven or legally verified, they remain a deeply serious spiritual problem. If God condemned these practices in the Bible, then God-fearing Rigo inland people ought to *destroy* the triangular mode of *ghora* killing by revealing the dangers of cooperation with demonic spirits and discouraging people from becoming involved.

On the other hand, people who resort to these practices need help themselves because they are held in demonic bondage. They seek power, recognition, popularity, and wealth, but they cannot get these things through hard work, so they resort to supernatural means. Stephen Hayes rightly puts it by saying that "in many cases it is their very powerlessness that has caused such people to use magical means. It is their disempowerment that caused them to resort to witchcraft or sorcery in the first place."¹⁷

People who wish to emulate Christ can be like Jesus in saving these people. Jesus came to set Satan's captives free (Matt 12:22-29; Luke 4:18-21) and in all his dealings with demons he had great compassion for those who were possessed. For example, he commanded the evil spirits in the Gerasene demoniac to come out (Luke 8:29). Likewise, he ordered the demon to come out of the man in the synagogue (Mark 1:27) and from the young dumb boy (Mark 9:25). Jesus simply commanded the demons and they obeyed him (Luke 4:36). The demons in the Gerasene demoniac even needed Jesus' permission to enter the pigs (Mark 5:13; Lk 8:32). He also denied demons permission to speak (Mk 1:34; Lk 4:41).

Like Jesus, godly men and women can through the Word of God point out the dangers involved in *ghora*, *babarau*, *toe-yawa*, and other related practices. God-fearing people in Rigo inland have the authority and mandate to resist and overcome Satan and his demons (see Matt 10:1) by rekindling the strong advocacy against satanic practices of the early and the later Seventh-day Adventist missionaries. This should be done not only for people's good, but on the basis of Christ's finished work on the cross.

¹⁷ S. Hayes, "Christian Response to Witchcraft and Sorcery," *Missionalia* 23 (1995): 12 (239-53).



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**The Triangle of *Ghora* Killing in Rigo Inland
in the Central Province of Papua New Guinea:
a Biblical Response**

Thomas Davai Jr.

**Responding to Contemporary Issues:
a Gospel-centred Contextualisation**

Ma'afu Palu

**The Sermon on the Mount
or Cultural Religion: Ministry Practice
and Theological Education in Papua New Guinea**

Scott D. Charlesworth

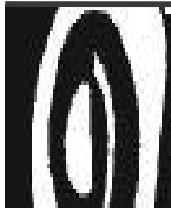
Summary Article

**Helping Youth of the Ghatapa Association
of the South Sea Evangelical Church
Understand their Familial Identity in Christ
in the Midst of Changes Brought on by Globalisation**

Celestial Prasad Yejerla



Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools



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RESPONDING TO CONTEMPORARY ISSUES: A GOSPEL-CENTRED CONTEXTUALISATION

Ma'afu Palu

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Abstract

This article looks at various attempts in the recent history of biblical interpretation that seek to make the Bible relevant to us today. Among the views surveyed will be: Hans-Georg Gadamer's idea of the "fusion of horizons"; Rudolf Bultmann's observation that exegesis without presupposition or pre-understanding of the text is impossible; Karl Barth's idea of "entering the strange new world of the Bible"; Wolfhart Pannenberg's idea of history as revelation, in which history's true meaning is found in the end which comes proleptically to us in Christ's resurrection; Gerhard von Rad's notion of typology; Martin Noth's representation of past truths in terms of religious festivals; Paul Ricoeur's *reconfiguring* our lives as the proof we have understood a given text; N. T. Wright's ongoing retelling of narratives; and others whose views may be found relevant to this article's purpose. These scholars express the essential value of the problem with which we are dealing in the theological enterprise, not only here in the Pacific, but also in the broader theological context. In this the first of three articles, I will draw on their wisdom to construct a gospel-centred contextualisation as a tool for responding to contemporary issues. The three articles were presented as the keynote lectures at MATS 2014 and I have elected to retain much of the feel of the original papers.

Keywords

Contextualisation, theological interpretation, Pacific, Gadamer, Bultmann, Barth, Pannenberg, Noth, von Rad, Ricoeur, Wright, gospel

I. RESPONDING TO CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN THE PACIFIC, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MELANESIA

This conference summons us as Pacific theologians to give a gospel response to issues we are facing in Melanesia and the wider Pacific. The response, as the topic indicates, has to be biblical, theological, and missiological in character. So it is mandatory for you and me – Pacific theologians – to leave at the end of this conference saying to ourselves, "This is how to respond to

issues today, not only here in Melanesia, but in Polynesia, Micronesia, and Pasikasia (the Asian Pacific).”

Let me outline to you how I plan to proceed in this series of articles. A story is told here in Melanesia that if you were to give a family some fish, then they could eat fish for one day. But if you can teach the family how to fish, then they will eat fish for the rest of their lives. So, in these three papers, my aim is not to “fish for solutions” to our contemporary problems, but rather to show you “how to fish for solutions” in any given “rough situation” you may be facing here in Melanesia or elsewhere.

In this first article, I will outline the scholarly foundation upon which we will build a gospel-centred contextualisation model for Pacific theology. In the second article, I wish to show from the Bible how the word of God spoken to past “situations in life” can also be the word of God to us in our present situation in life here in Melanesia, in the Pacific and, more broadly, in the world. In the final article, I propose to demonstrate what I will call a Pacific Biblical Theology – the aim of which is to bring the whole Bible to bear on any issue that we may face today or in the future here in the Pacific or in other parts of the world.

II. CONTEMPORARY ISSUES AND CURRENT RESPONSES

There are currently many ways in which the world is responding to the problems we face, not only here in Melanesia, but also all over the Pacific. Most of them are to do with education and training, but there are also other forms of response.

For the problem of corruption among our political leaders (besides the effort to bring Prime Minister O’Neill to justice here in Papua New Guinea), there is now a Pacific Leadership Program funded by Australia and other nations to train future leaders.

For the problem of the poor and of a struggling economy, world leaders come to the Pacific Forum meetings to talk to our leaders and even to offer financial assistance where it is needed. Despite the claim that the Papua New Guinean economy has been growing strongly, I am told that local people, especially those running small businesses, are really struggling to survive on a daily basis.

For the problem of tribal conflicts and civil unrest, our Pacific neighbours have organised peacekeeping forces comprised of army officials and police

officers to calm local situations. Yet most social contexts here in the Pacific are unpredictable and can run out of control even for the law-enforcement officers.

For the rising problem of sexually-transmitted diseases, we have been provided with condoms and training on “sex education” and “(un)safe sex”. Yet, abortion and teen pregnancies appear to be rising everywhere in the Pacific.

For the rise of theft and robbery, our governments are looking into ways in which education is made more accessible and employment is increasingly available. Yet the crime rate seems to be rising like a jet plane taking off.

The world and even some of our own Pacific neighbours have, indeed, responded to the current issues that we are facing. Yet problems remain.

III. RESPONDING AS THE CHURCH OF GOD IN MELANESIA AND IN THE PACIFIC

What about Christians, the church, and Pacific theologians? How best can we respond to current issues in our world here in the Pacific? To construct a gospel response to our problems, biblically, theologically, and missiologically is to seek to understand what God has to say in the Bible about our problems. God, of course, is able to speak to us directly. But new revelation from the Holy Spirit and new words from God must not contradict the Bible since God does not contradict himself (cf. 2 Tim 2:13; Heb 6:18). Our question should primarily be, “What does God say to us today about our problems? What does the Bible say to us about our problems?”

1. *What the Bible Says = What God Says*

It is one of the hallmarks of the apostolic witness to Jesus to presuppose that “Thus says the LORD God” is the same as “Scripture says.” Paul claims (in Rom 9:17) that the Scripture speaks to Pharaoh, quoting Exodus 9:16. In the context of Exodus 9:16, it is actually “Thus says the LORD God” (Ex 9:13). Again, Paul says that the Scriptures foreseeing the justification of the Gentiles by faith, proclaim to Abraham, “All nations shall be blessed through you.”¹ In the original context in Genesis 12:3 it is actually God who speaks to Abraham

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all Bible quotations are taken from the ESV.

promising him the blessings of the nations. This blessing, according to Paul, is justification by faith (Gal 3:8).

In resisting Satan three times Jesus quoted Scripture and asserted, “It is written” (Matt 4:4, 7, 10). Jesus the incarnated Word of God draws on the authority of the written word of God to resist Satan who eventually flees from him. The Scriptures are not only the voice of God, but also bear the authority of God ultimately to bring defeat on the source of all our problems, the devil.

In one of his shorter writings, Rudolf Bultmann outlines the historical role of the church in presenting the Bible as God’s word:

The Bible does not approach us at all like other books nor like other “religious voices of the nations” as catering for our interest. It claims from the outset to be God’s word. We did not come across the Bible in the course of our cultural studies as we come across, for example, Plato or the *Bhagavad-Gita*. We came to know it through the Christian church which put it before us with its authoritative claim. The church’s preaching, founded on the Scriptures, passes on the word of the Scriptures. It says: God speaks to you *here!* In his majesty he has chosen *this* place! We cannot question whether this place is the right one; we must listen to the call that summons us.²

So, in order to “weave” theological mats upon which we, as Pacific theologians, would gather to discuss our contemporary issues and search for solutions we must turn to the Bible to provide the “raw materials” as well as the shape of our “theological mats.”

There are, however, several misunderstandings of the Bible’s place in our thinking that tend to undermine its authority to speak to our problems in the Pacific. So, we need to respond to these perceptions before we continue to seek God’s will for us today from the Bible.

2. Bible-Plus View

People who hold this view accept the authority of the Bible *plus* human resources as having the same authority. Human resources come in the forms of scholarship, church traditions, spiritual experiences, religious sacred

² R. Bultmann, “How Does God Speak Through the Bible?”, in *Existence and Faith. Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann* (trans. and ed. S.M. Ogden; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1961), 168 (166-170), emphasizes his. Here Bultmann appears to be promoting a high view of Scripture. However, he seems to have thought that the voice of science must accompany the voice of God in the application of the Bible (see § VI.1 below).

writings, or visions and dreams. For example, the Wesleyan Quadrilateral affirms that human reason, experience, tradition, and the Bible are all on the same level of authority. In addressing a particular issue, whichever of these things proves more persuasive should, therefore, be taken as the will of God for that issue. Hence, homosexuality is now acceptable in some quarters of the church because of people claiming to be “more fulfilled” in their experience of a homosexual rather than heterosexual relationship. In that case, the apparently clear voice of Scripture is silenced as the church chooses to listen to some of its members own self-centred experience.

The Roman Catholic’s magisterium is another example of this Bible-*plus* view where the authority of the Pope and church traditions are placed on a similar platform to that of the Bible. However, when we accept another authority as similar to that of the Scriptures we will eventually reject the Bible as God’s voice in the church today.

The Book of Mormon and the Koran are excellent examples of sacred writings that are upheld by their adherents as having the same authority as the Scriptures or even as complementary to the Scriptures. However, as we have seen, the Bible claims that “what God says, Scripture says”. There is a uniqueness in the Bible’s claim to its authority in relation to these other religious documents. Even within the Bible there are claims that no other supplementary or complementary works are needed in addition to it (Rev 22:18-19).

So, we must not let go of God’s Word in order to uphold human traditions (cf. Mark 7:8). We can certainly draw on human resources. For instance, later on in this article we will draw on what scholars have said in relation to our subject matter in order to help us understand the Scriptures better. The Bible also draws on human wisdom to help people better understand God’s word. For example, Solomon in Proverbs 30 and 31 adopts the words of Agur and King Lemuel. Even Paul, in his preaching in the Areopagus in Athens, draws on the philosophers to explain some fundamental ideas of the Bible (Acts 17:17-31).

3. The Bible-Minus View

This view is held by people who in their hearts would say, “The Bible no more!” They consider the Bible as the “letter that kills” (cf. 2 Cor 3:6). This claim is sometimes made by believers who have had a bad experience with

people who insisted on the authority of the Bible alone, to the extent of denying the present activity of the Holy Spirit in believers' lives. Both views – Bible without the Spirit and the Spirit without the Bible – are mistaken. They both think that God speaks to us, *either* in the Bible, *or* by his Spirit. The Bible, on the other hand, states that the Spirit of God speaks through the Bible since “all Scriptures are God breathed” (2 Tim 3:16). Since God cannot lie, the present activity of the Holy Spirit cannot contradict what God had said in the Scriptures.

Theological liberalism's formulation of this view is to believe that the Bible is a kind of tradition that is enslaving and, therefore, we need to liberate ourselves from it and move on to other more personal means of knowing God. But to move from the Bible to personal revelation and personal experience of God is to leave the house which is founded on the rock and choose the house built upon shifting sands (cf. Matt 7:24-27). The Bible tells us that “everyone is a liar” (Ps 116:11 NIV), but that “it is impossible for God to lie” (Heb 6:18 NIV). The New Testament church in Corinth had believers with personal revelations, but they were subjected to the prophetic word of God, presumably in the Scriptures (1 Cor 14:29-32).

Likewise, one of the underlying convictions of postmodernism is that the Bible is “God-limiting,” in the sense that God cannot be fully contained in a book. This is true ontologically in that one must say that the God of the Bible is the Trinitarian God who is unfathomable, even with our well-rounded verbal expressions. Yet, as a book the Bible conveys to us an unlimited, inscrutable God.

It is also worth reminding ourselves here in the Pacific that the current drive towards contextualisation in Pacific theology had its starting point in thinking that the Bible is irrelevant to us unless we redescribe it using cultural expressions more familiar to our people. Thus, we are told that, in order to construct a Pacific theology, we must look into our physical surroundings, our social interactions, our myths and legends, and other cultural categories as the basis for redescribing the gospel message in a Pacific way.³ We will see in the next article that biblical writers apply biblical stories directly to new contexts

³ This is the initiative of Sione ‘Amanaki Havea in Pacific Theology: see M. Palu, “Dr Sione ‘Amanaki Havea of Tonga: the Architect of Pacific Theology,” *MJT* 28.2 (2012): 67-81.

without resorting to any of the contextual models utilised in missiological literatures today.⁴

4. The Bible Within

Today some people turn to the quiet inner voice of God for instructions, visions, and directions about specific issues in their lives or in their surroundings. So, in a misinterpretation of Psalm 46:10 (“Be still and know that I am God”), we are told to be silent and God will speak to us. Undoubtedly, God is able to speak directly to us today. But the Bible tells us that Jesus is God’s final word for us in these last days (Heb 1:1-2). It is because of our refusal to believe in Jesus as God’s last word to us in the Bible that we tend to look for fresh revelations. As previously mentioned, in the New Testament church personal revelations were to be assessed by the prophetic word of Scripture (1 Cor 14). But, also in the New Testament church, there were people who thought themselves to be above other believers because they attained visions and dreams of angels and other supernatural beings. Paul rebuked them saying that such experience does not make some believers more godly than others (Col 2:23).

We must also remind ourselves that prayer is essentially talking to God and not listening to God. If God speaks through the Scriptures, as we have seen, then we can listen to God by reading the Bible. In relation to prayer, however, when Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “He said to them, when you pray, say ...”, and then he gave them the words of the Lord’s prayer (Luke 11:2).

IV. THE BIBLE AS GOD’S VOICE IS FOUNDATIONAL FOR A GOSPEL RESPONSE BY PACIFICIANS

In this series of three articles, my aim is to construct a gospel response to issues in Melanesia from the biblical, theological, and missiological viewpoint of, what I have termed, a Pacifician. A theological reflection by a Westerner is referred to as Western theology. So, a theological reflection by a Pacifician might be called Pacific theology.

⁴ S.B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992), as summarised in J. Meo, “How Do We Do Contextual Theology,” *Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series 2, 27 (2002): 41-60.

In general, our culture in the Pacific is Christianised. Among many other things, this implies that our people are still very conservative in their Christianity, as well as their attitude towards the Bible. The Bible is generally upheld as God's word. In a very real sense, our people in the Pacific embrace this conviction. They are happily unaware of most sceptical and critical views of the Bible and of the Jesus advocated by biblical and theological scholarship. So, for a Pacific theology to be true to the context common to our people, it is crucial that it uphold the Bible as God's word.

1. A Gospel Response and the Gospel Message

As mentioned previously, the theme of this conference calls us to a "gospel response." What is a gospel response? Is it a response in line with the gospel message? Is it a set of instructions, derived from the gospel message itself, used to address specific issues here in Melanesia? These questions express the centrality of the gospel message in any given response that we may offer to the broken situations in which we live here in the Pacific and, more specifically, in the Melanesian context.

Paul is the one who popularised the word "gospel" even though the origin of its usage can be traced to Jesus (cf. Mark 1:15).⁵ To him, the gospel is not only a revelation from Jesus Christ but it is also a tradition passed on to him as of first importance. He declared that the gospel is that "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3-4).

Here, the source of the gospel is the Scriptures. In fact, all of Scripture is about the gospel. It was promised beforehand in the Old Testament, but was realised in the person of Jesus Christ to whom the New Testament bears reliable eyewitness testimony (Rom 1:3-4). In fact, Jesus says, that the Old Testament was written to testify to him so we may come to him and find life (John 5:39-40). For this reason the gospel is the centre of the Scriptures. In order for us, therefore, to give a "gospel response" we must listen to what God says to us through the Scriptures about our specific situations in Melanesia and in the Pacific.

⁵ M. Palu, *Jesus and Time: An Interpretation of Mark 1.15* (Library of New Testament 468; London: T&T Clark, 2012), 207.

2. The Bible was Written for our Instruction

Even though the Bible is God's word spoken to a historical context in the past, Paul says that it was "written for our instructions" (Rom 15:4).⁶ Its relevance is affirmed by saying that it is indeed the "living and active" word of God (Heb 4:12). So, it seems to me, that contextualisation, understood as an attempt to make the Bible relevant to us, is to be built upon this starting point. As the living and active word of God, the Bible is relevant to us because in it we can hear God speaking to us in our specific situations in every age and cultural context.

V. TOWARDS A GOSPEL RESPONDING TO CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN MELANESIA

We have seen that the gospel is the centre of the "big story" of the Bible. Therefore, the method taken here will be a whole-of-Bible approach to issues, not only here in Melanesia, but also in the rest of the Pacific and the world. In dealing with contemporary issues here in Melanesia and even in the rest of the Pacific we need to begin with the gospel.

To be more specific, I wish to propose a gospel-centred contextualisation approach to the issues that we face here in the Pacific. This means that we begin from the standpoint of the gospel in order to understand how the Bible fits together from its beginning to the end. We also need the gospel in order to understand the issues that we are facing as well as the proper response that is required.

1. We Need a Gospel Understanding of the Issues

We also need a gospel understanding of the specific issues that we are facing here in the Melanesia and also in the Pacific. That is, whether the problems may be political, social, economic, or religious, we need to start by understanding that the heart of any problem is the problem of the heart. What you are facing in the contemporary situation here in Melanesia is the same problem as those that we, in Polynesia, are facing and the same as those facing the rest of the world. The underlying problem is the sinfulness of the human heart. We are naturally born as sinners not saints (Ps 51:5; Rom 3:10-

⁶ B.S. Rosner, "'Written for Us': Paul's View of Scripture," in *A Pathway Into the Holy Scripture* (ed. P.E. Satterthwaite and D.F. Wright; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 81-95.

12). We are born enslaved to sin and not with a free will (John 8:34). The proper study of our problems is, therefore, to know ourselves. That is, to know that we are sinners and that given the right kind of opportunities we will sin. This conference is calling us to a gospel response to sin and to the sinfulness of men and women in Melanesia. If we want to deal with the root of our problems, we need to know what God has done about sin.

2. We Need a Gospel Perspective for Responding to the Issues

Understanding that our problem is the sinfulness of the human heart is the proper starting point for finding a solution. God has provided a solution to our problems, whether it is here in Melanesia or elsewhere. Indeed, God has given us a gospel response to our problems. Paul says, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3-4).

This is the basis for God’s solution to the problems that you are facing here in Melanesia as well as for those in the rest of the world. God has dealt decisively with sin. Christ died for our sins. This is God’s atoning provision to all our problems. Our people need to be confronted with Christ crucified. Paul tells the Galatian believers that, before their eyes, “Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified” (Gal 3:1). To preach the gospel of Christ who died for our sins is to portray him as publicly crucified before people. It is this message of Christ crucified that anoints our hearts with the Holy Spirit who affirms in our hearts the assurance of being justified by faith and thus partaking in the blessing promised to Abraham.

So, the proper gospel response to our problems, not only here in Melanesia, but in the rest of the Pacific and in the world, is the message of the cross of Jesus. To the Greek, whose hope was in the wisdom of this world to help solve his problems, the cross of Christ was foolishness. To the Jew, who thought that there should be a miraculous and more supernatural response, the cross of Christ was a stumbling block (cf. 1 Cor 1:18). To believers, the cross of Christ is the power of God for the salvation of people, situations, tribes, languages, social status, and governments, simply because it is God’s power to rescue us from perishing in hell (cf. Rom 1:16-17).

If the gospel is God’s response to our problems, then our theological colleges should have the vision of training theologians to be evangelists and

evangelists to be theologians. Paul's charge to Timothy, which has now resulted in the spread of Christianity for more than 2,000 years, is also the charge we must keep: "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead and his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching" (2 Tim 4:1-2). To know God is to know that we study, move, and exist in the presence of the judge of the world. He will judge us. So preach the word. Do the work of an evangelist. Preach the word, be ready, in season and out of season. The inspired Scripture is able to make our people wise towards salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

VI. SCHOLARLY REFLECTIONS: THE BIBLE SPEAKS TO THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION

The preacher's question is, how to speak the word of God afresh to every situation to which he is called. How can the word of God given to Moses, to the prophets, to the Psalmist, to the Gospel writers, and to Paul be God's living and active word for us today? As Pacifician preachers we believe that every word is inspired by God and is, therefore, useful for instruction, for correcting, for rebuke, and for training in righteousness. Preachers also believe that the Bible is the living and active word of God and so speaks the word of God to us today. In order to enrich our gospel response to contemporary issues, we now turn to scholarly reflections on how we may fulfil our tasks as faithful preachers of God's word in responding to issues we face here in Melanesia and in the rest of the world.

1. Rudolf Bultmann

Bultmann suggests that we need demythologisation to make the Bible relevant to us today.⁷ Demythologisation includes the process of removing biblical elements which do not find support in modern science, things like heaven and hell, healings and exorcisms, and so forth. In order for the Bible to speak to us today, says Bultmann, its biblical content has to accommodate technological and scientific progress. We do not die and continue either in heaven or hell. Death is the end of existence and there is no more. He rightly

⁷ R. Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 18.

observes that it is impossible to do exegesis without presupposition or pre-understanding. But Bultmann thinks that the right pre-understanding is one that is shaped by the scientific worldview which is to be imposed upon the biblical text. The effect of this method of interpretation is to let the Bible speak to us with the voice of modern science. This principle is similar to the kind of contextualisation that allows the voice of culture to dominate the biblical text.

2. Karl Barth

Barth is more Bible-centred in his approach. He observes that from the “in the beginning” of Genesis 1 to the prayer “come Lord Jesus” at the end of the Bible we are exposed to a “strange new world”.⁸ It is strange to us because in the “world of the Bible” God’s purpose of setting up his kingdom is the ultimate goal. He invites us by grace to “enter” by faith the strange new world of the Bible and partake in bringing his purpose to realisation. While Bultmann seeks to strip the Bible of its worldview, Barth wants us to “enter” the biblical world and partake in God’s purpose of setting up his kingdom. This, in my judgment, is one way in which Gadamer’s “fusion of the horizon” can take place (see below).⁹ By entering the strange new world of the Bible we allow our ideas of God to be shaped ultimately by the Bible’s worldview.

3. Wolfhart Pannenberg

Pannenberg argues that all of history (and not just the “history of special revelation”) reveals God’s purpose.¹⁰ Yet, the meaning of history can only be found at the end of history. However, the end of history has broken in

⁸ K. Barth, “The Strange New World Within the Bible,” in *The Word of God and The Word of Man* (trans. D. Horton; Gloucester Peter Smith, 1978), 28-50, esp. 31-32.

⁹ H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975), 415. For a concise discussion of Gadamer’s idea and its implication for hermeneutics see A.C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Bible Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 313-30.

¹⁰ W. Pannenberg, *Revelation as History* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1969), 131. Due to the fundamentally historical orientation of the kind of biblical theology advocated by the Moore School (see below), Pannenberg’s view of history is understandably adopted as essential; see G. Goldsworthy, *Gospel-centred Hermeneutics: Biblical-theological Foundations and Principles* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2006), 56-61.

proleptically in Jesus and his resurrection. So, history is a mode of living towards the resurrection.¹¹

4. Gerhard von Rad

Gerhard von Rad observes a typological relationship within the Old Testament in which God's activities in Israel's history provide "types" of more glorious new activities which are fulfilled in Christ. So there is a "new exodus," "new heavens and new earth," a "new covenant," and a "new David" to rule over God's people. Similarly, the story of God's activities in Israel until the Exile is to be a "type" of the new activities of God that ultimately find their fulfilment in Jesus Christ. We will see later that von Rad's scheme has become foundational in developing a biblical, theological framework for understanding the whole Bible. In this typological relationship von Rad also observes that books like Deuteronomy were preached to an Israel living in a situation between the promise and the fulfilment, not only in the wilderness and in Canaan, but also after the return from the Babylonian exile.¹² The similarities of the two different historical situations set up a typological relationship that makes the word spoken to a past historical situation relevant to a later historical situation. We will see that von Rad's observation is very helpful in preaching the message of biblical books to us today.

5. Martin Noth

Noth is perhaps well known for his theory of the Deuteronomistic historical framework of the history of Israel from Joshua to 2 Kings. According to Noth, Deuteronomy to 2 Kings is a single literary work composed by a writer who upholds the viewpoint of Deuteronomy. Blessings and curses depend very much on Israel's kings and their relationship to the Law. However, he also observes that the way in which the Law was recalled and contemporised in the community of Israel is by means of the "re-presentation" of Israel's experience of God in their contemporary contexts through religious

¹¹ Palu, *Jesus and Time*, 232.

¹² G. von Rad, *From Genesis to Chronicles: Explorations in Old Testament Theology* (ed. K.C. Hanson; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 89-98.

festivals.¹³ For example, the Passover is a way of re-presenting the exodus to later generations, and so forth. To bring it closer to us, the Lord's Supper is a "re-presentation" of the death of Christ whereby we proclaim the death of Jesus today until he comes.

6. Hans-Georg Gadamer

Gadamer speaks of the horizons of understanding – the horizon of the text and the horizon of the reader. In order for the reader to understand the text there has to be a fusion of the horizons of text and of the reader. This can be done by means of the process of distanciation in which the reader distances himself from his own understanding of what the biblical text is saying in order to move closer and closer in line with the biblical text's meaning in its biblical context.¹⁴ It is through this "fusion of horizons" that the biblical text can speak to the contemporary issues that we face. Gadamer's view means that in order to understand the Bible, we need to leave our own cultural bias and be open to understanding the Bible in its own biblical literary and historical context first.

7. Paul Ricoeur

Ricoeur argues that meaning should not be projected to the "world behind the text" but, rather, to the "world in front of the text". In other words, meaning is found not in its correspondence to a reality behind the text – whether historical or otherwise. Meaning, rather, is to be found in its correspondence to our lives. The hermeneutical question is no longer what did it mean to them in the past. Rather, what does it mean to us today? He picks on poetic languages to exemplify his view. He observes that poem re-describes reality by way of replotting it in such a way that it inspires us to take their examples as a mode of living in this world. In a poem, understanding is no longer a word-to-world correspondence, but, rather, a word-to-life correspondence. In accordance with this linguistic schema, "truth no longer means verification

¹³ M. Noth, "The 'Re-presentation' of the Old Testament in Proclamation," in *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics* (ed. C. Westermann; trans. J.L. Mays; Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963), 76-88.

¹⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 407-23. For a concise discussion of this notion, see D.A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 120.

but *manifestation*, i.e., letting what shows itself be.”¹⁵ In the word of Kevin Vanhoozer, the interpreter is the “bearer of the Word” and the text aims at producing real effects on readers: at transforming them into the image of the Word: “It wants not only to be followed but to be, as it were, incarnated. The end of interpretation, I submit, is *embodiment*.”¹⁶

8. N. T. Wright

Wright is convinced that the biblical drama was concluded with Jesus and the apostles. In order to contemporise the story of the Bible we need experienced “performers” who have immersed themselves in the biblical drama of God, and so, continue living the drama of God in our midst today.¹⁷ Wright seems to be upholding the same view as those of Ricoeur in terms of the importance of validating the truth claims of the Bible in its application – its godly performance by believers who have thoroughly acquainted themselves with the biblical worldview.

9. Graeme Goldsworthy

Goldsworthy insists that the proper key to interpretation of the Bible is the gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord. In response to Bultmann’s insistence on the impossibility of an unbiased exegesis, I believe that the right kind of bias to the interpretation of the Bible is the gospel message of Jesus Christ.¹⁸

10. Pacificians as Gentiles as Our Starting Point

As Pacificians, we do not belong to the historic Israel. We approach the Bible always from a starting point outside the sphere of God’s promised blessings in the Bible. As Barth observes, however, the gospel has extended God’s gracious invitation to us through the blood of Jesus to enter by faith the

¹⁵ P. Ricoeur, “Towards a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation,” *Harvard Theological Review* 70 (1977): 25 (1-37).

¹⁶ K.J. Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in This Text?: the Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 440. His italics.

¹⁷ N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God, 1; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 140-43.

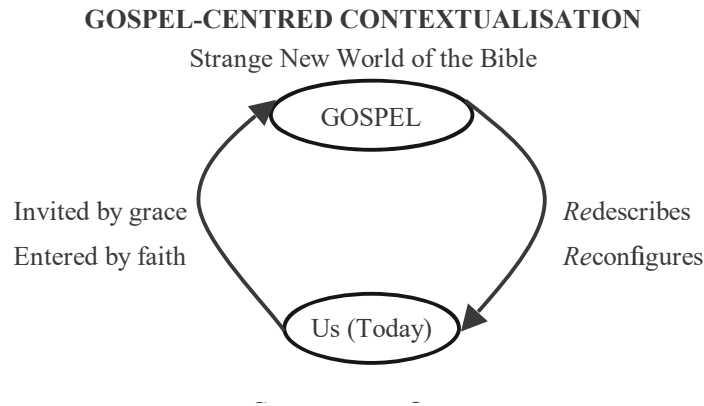
¹⁸ G. Goldsworthy, *Gospel-centred Hermeneutics: Biblical-theological Foundations and Principles* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2006), 47-48.

strange new world of the Bible and partake in the blessings of God’s people.¹⁹ In fact, as believers in Jesus we become heirs of Abraham (Gal 3:29).

VII. CONSTRUCTING A GOSPEL-CENTRED CONTEXTUALISATION

Here let me attempt to tie together the loose ends of these scholarly views and to derive for us a gospel-centred approach that, in my judgment, could help us Pacificans appreciate the biblical data in a manner more faithful to biblical terms and more helpful in addressing the issues we face today. That is, I am going to show you how to “fish” for solutions to problems from the “ocean” of the biblical storyline. And there is always plenty of “fish” in the “sea.” So, we must “fish” with a view to success.

With Pannenberg, we assert that all of history is indeed embraced in God’s purpose, the end of which confronts us in the fulfilment of time with the risen Jesus.²⁰ This means that every human is living their personal story as progressing towards the general resurrection – “for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice, and come out – those who have done good will rise to live and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned” (John 5:28-29 NIV).



¹⁹ Barth, “The Strange New World Within the Bible,” 50.

²⁰ W. Pannenberg, *Revelation as History* (ed. D. Granskou; trans. E. Quinn; London: Sheed and Ward, 1969), 125-58.

With Bultmann we can affirm that exegesis without presupposition is actually impossible because in a very true sense our pre-understanding shapes us.²¹ Yet, with Barth we must say that rather than stripping the Bible of its so-called mythological elements (as Bultmann suggests), the Bible does indeed convey to us “a strange new world.” It is a world that reveals God’s plan for us and not our plan for God. It tells us that God is in the process of establishing his kingdom. So, we are invited by grace to enter by faith into this “strange new world” and to be God’s “co-workers” in living out his vision in our personal lives on a daily basis. Thus, a gospel-centred contextualisation observes that the gracious invitation offered to us by the strange new world of the Bible comes through the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel message of Jesus Christ becomes the right pre-understanding for entering the strange new world of the Bible.

With Gadamer and Ricoeur we agree that entering the strange new world of the Bible is achieved by a fusion of the horizons of the text and the reader. Ricoeur helps us to see that the fusion of horizon Gadamer wishes to achieve should rightly occur in the world in front of the biblical text. That is, the fusion of horizon is only seen when we surrender ourselves to the biblical storyline in order to discern how the biblical text can be faithfully applied to our lives. In fact, faith seeks understanding, but understanding is rightly shown in performance; in a life lived, as Wright observes, fully immersed within the drama of God.

The application of God’s word to us makes good use of von Rad’s observation of the typological relation between “situations in life” in the biblical texts and our contemporary situation in life. Just as Israel is addressed in Deuteronomy as a people living in the history of salvation between promise and fulfilment, so is the church of God in Melanesia and in the Pacific. We too are people living with the hope of entering the promised land still in our future. This application of God’s word to our lives agrees with Noth that preaching, shaped and informed by the gospel framework is indeed a “re-presentation” of the activities of God in the past to our contemporary contexts.

²¹ Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 46.

VIII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In summary, a gospel-centred contextualisation takes the Bible as a whole in conveying to us a strange new world (Barth) into which we have been invited by grace to enter by faith in Jesus Christ. The strange new world of the Bible embraces all of history, the end of which has been forecast in the resurrection of Jesus at the centre of history (Pannenberg). This history can be personally experienced in living with the expectation of the general resurrection. Our situation in life in the Pacific between the promise of Jesus' coming again and its fulfilment in the return of Jesus in the general resurrection resembles the life situation found in the Law and the Prophets in the Old Testament (von Rad). We will see in later papers that this situation in life embraces all of the Bible. Its application is the fusion of the horizons (Gadamer) which can be achieved through entering the strange new world of the Bible and fully immersing ourselves in it (Wright) in order to allow the strange new world of the Bible to re-describe and re-configure the realities of our lives (Ricoeur). On a weekly basis our preaching re-presents the mighty acts of God in the past into our contemporary situation (Noth). For lack of better terms, I wish to refer to this gospel-centred approach to contextualisation as a contextualisation of surrender. We surrender ourselves and our pre-understandings to the strange new world of the Bible and allow the world of the Bible to re-configure and re-describe ourselves and the issues that we are facing in order to transform us more and more into the likeness of Christ.



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**The Sermon on the Mount
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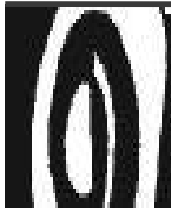
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**Helping Youth of the Ghatapa Association
of the South Sea Evangelical Church
Understand their Familial Identity in Christ
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Celestial Prasad Yejerla



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THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT OR CULTURAL RELIGION: MINISTRY PRACTICE AND THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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Abstract

The Sermon on the Mount is a profound critique of first-century Judaism's accommodation of culture. Cultural imperatives are turned on their head on two fronts. (1) Honour and shame: shame becomes the new honour in a series of antitheses that expose the external focus of Jewish religion. (2) Covenant: as far as the Jews were concerned, the Abrahamic covenant appeared to be compatible with culture. It was easy to equate cultural honour – i.e., status deriving from wealth or position – with the blessing of God. That theology is largely reinterpreted, if not denied, by Jesus. The greatest blessing that the righteous can receive is persecution and shaming by cultural religionists. Jesus draws his covenant theology from Isaiah, Lamentations, wisdom literature, and the experience of the prophets. He understands that all who speak against cultural religion will be persecuted. From an honour-shame cultural standpoint, this is an enormously confronting teaching. In view of that, the implications of a counter-cultural Jesus for Christianity in Papua New Guinea are examined. Since I am a New Testament scholar, and not a missiologist, parts of the second half of this essay are anecdotal and based on what I learned teaching biblical languages and studies during a lengthy sojourn in Papua New Guinea.

Keywords

Sermon on the Mount, cheek, culture, identity, missiological, counter-cultural, big man, ministry, theological education

SOCIAL IDENTITY IN THE GRAECO-ROMAN WORLD

People in the ancient world did not understand themselves to be individuals with autonomous personalities like modern human beings. For that reason, as Kloppenborg observes, much North-Atlantic biblical interpretation

has been riddled with ethnocentric and anachronistic readings and translations of texts which routinely miss basic Mediterranean values (e.g., honour, shame, hospitality, and purity), social and economic structures, and the mechanisms of exchange (e.g., patronage, euergetism, and reciprocity). Such interpretations imagine social and economic exchange to occur in much the same way and for the same reasons as social exchange in post-Industrial Revolution cultures. The result both misconstrues certain details of the text, and misses others.¹

According to Malina, ancient Mediterranean identity was collectivist, “group-embedded, group-oriented.” First-century people did not think of themselves as individuals who acted alone regardless of what others thought and did. A meaningful human existence depended on a person’s full awareness of what others thought and felt about them, and “on their living up to that awareness.” Identity was derived from relationships with others and a person’s place in the various groups/networks of relationships in which they participated (family, village, ethnic group, artisan guild, or political body). Instead of deriving from individual psychological awareness, motivations and attitudes sprang from “culturally-shared stereotypes, from generalities perceived to inhere” in the various groups/relationship networks. These stereotypes, too, arose not from individualistic self-examination, but “from obvious and apparent group traits and behaviour.”² Ancient Mediterranean people tended

¹ J. Kloppenborg, “Pastoralism, Papyri and the Parable of the Shepherd,” in *Light from the East: Papyrologische Kommentare zum Neuen Testament. Akten des internationalen Symposions vom Dezember 3-4, 2009, am Fachbereich Bibelwissenschaft und Kirchengeschichte der Universität Salzburg* (ed. P. Arzt-Grabner and C.M. Kreinecker; Philippika-Marburger alterskundliche Abhandlungen 39; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), 48 (47-69). The accuracy of this statement as regards scholarship on the Sermon on the Mount is confirmed by a reading of the “History of Interpretation” section in W.S. Kissinger, *The Sermon on the Mount: a History of Interpretation and Bibliography* (ATLA Bibliography Series 3; Metuchen: Scarecrow, 1975), 1-125.

² B.J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (3rd ed.; Atlanta: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 58, 75. See also, for example: J.J. Pilch, ed., *Social Scientific Models for Interpreting the Bible: Essays by the Context Group in Honour of Bruce J. Malina* (Biblical Interpretation 53; Leiden: Brill, 2001); W. Stegemann, B.J. Malina, and G. Theissen, eds., *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002). For more works by members of the Context Group see <<http://www.contextgroup.org/MemberBibliographies.html>>.

to believe and presume that human character as specified in unique and distinct groups and their individual components ... [was] fixed and unchanging. Every family, tribe, village, city, and ethnic group would be quite predictable, and so would the individuals who were embedded in and shared the qualities of some family, tribe, village, city, or ethnic group.³

Thus, collectivist personality was characterised by conformity, a desire to act in accordance with outwardly-observable expectations, and subordination to one's social superiors in terms of wealth or status. Such conformity militated against introspection or self-revelation.⁴ The honourable person "would never expose his or her distinct individuality." Instead, s/he was "adept at keeping their innermost self concealed with a veil of conventionality and formality, ever alert ... to anything that would not tally with the socially-expected and defined forms of behaviour that ... [had] entitled them and their family to respect."⁵

ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN HONOUR-SHAME CULTURE

The primary concern, therefore, of first-century Mediterranean people was their honour rating "within [their] significant groups," and the assessment of that rating relative to other groups.⁶ Concern for honour

³ Malina, *New Testament World*, 64. Because unpredictability could not be traced to predictable human beings, it made "no cultural sense at all" to look for "uniquely personal, individualistic motives or introspectively generated explanations for human behaviour."

⁴ The admittedly broad generalisations drawn by those using cross-cultural models to understand the NT have attracted some criticism. See, most notably for current purposes, L.J. Lawrence, *An Ethnography of the Gospel of Matthew* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 165; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), and the negative review of her book by Z.A. Crook, "Methods and Models in New Testament Interpretation: a Critical Engagement with Louise Lawrence's Literary Ethnography," *Religious Studies Review* 32 (2006): 87-97. For more recent discussion of the issues see S.R. Nebreda, *Christ Identity: A Social-scientific Reading of Philippians 2:5-11* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2011), 88-117.

⁵ Malina, *New Testament World*, 59.

⁶ Malina, *New Testament World*, 75. In these terms, conscience "refers to a person's sensitive self-awareness to one's public ego-image along with the purpose of striving to align one's behaviour and self-assessment with that publicly-perceived image ... Conscience is a sort of internalisation of what others say, do, and think about oneself, since these others play the role of witness and judge. Their verdicts supply a person with grants of honour necessary for a meaningful, humane existence" (58-59).

permeated every aspect of public life in the Mediterranean world ... [It was] the fundamental value, the core, the heart, the soul ... Philo speaks of “wealth, fame, official posts, honours, and everything of that sort with which the majority of mankind are busy” (*Det.* 122) ... Simply stated, honour is public recognition. It is name or place. It is one’s status or standing in the village *together with the public recognition of it*. Public recognition is all-important: “Honour is the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society” ... To hang on to what honour one has is essential to life itself ... [It] is a claim to excel over others, to be superior, to demand *rights* on the basis of social precedence. Honour is likewise a limited good – related to control of scarce resources including land, crops, livestock, political clout, and female sexuality. Thus, honor gained is honor taken from another.⁷

As a result, first-century people engaged in a constant round of social evaluation of their own conduct and that of others. If anyone stepped out of the bounds of what was considered acceptable or moral behaviour, gossip and shaming were the informal and formal means respectively of bringing them back into line, of maintaining social control.⁸ Because honour could be acquired or lost, Mediterranean males (since gender roles were clearly differentiated) also engaged in a continual round of challenge and response. *Ascribed* honour, the honour derived from birth (the status of one’s family) or endowment by “persons of power,”⁹ was relatively static. But honour could also be *acquired* through benefaction, the acquisition of position or office, the exercise of courage or strength, or by proving one’s superiority in the constant round of challenge and response. Challenge and response were a

⁷ R.L. Rohrbaugh, *The New Testament in Cross-cultural Perspective* (Matrix: The Bible in Mediterranean Context; Eugene: Cascade, 2006), 31-32. Unless otherwise indicated, what follows is drawn from Rohrbaugh’s excellent summary (31-34). For a more detailed discussion of the subject see B.J. Malina and J.H. Neyrey, “Honour and Shame in Luke-Acts: Pivotal Values of the Mediterranean World,” in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (ed. J.H. Neyrey; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 25-65.

⁸ On gossip as a means of maintaining/enforcing group values and boundaries see R.L. Rohrbaugh, “Gossip in the New Testament,” in *Social Scientific Models for Interpreting the Bible: Essays by the Context Group in Honour of Bruce J. Malina* (ed. J.J. Pilch; Biblical Interpretation 53; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 239-59; E. van Eck, “Invitations and Excuses that Are Not Invitations and Excuses: Gossip in Luke 14:18-20,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 68.1 (2012), Art. #1243, 10 pages, <<http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v68i1.1243>>, accessed 17 March 2015.

⁹ Malina and Neyrey, “Honour and Shame in Luke-Acts,” 27-28.

feature “of every waking, public moment ... [and] in every case an honour challenge must be met ... To ignore a challenge ... [was] to have no shame. To run from a challenge ... [was] a coward’s disgrace.”¹⁰ That is, honour could also be lost as a result of inappropriate behaviour that brought shame and/or shaming.

1. Turning the Other Cheek (Matt 5:38-39)

In his book *Honour and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*, Neyrey interprets the six antitheses (“you have heard that it was said, but I say to you ...”) of Matthew 5:21-48 in terms of the “village and its face-to-face dynamics.” The focus is *achieved* rather than *ascribed* honour, how a man (men are clearly the implied subject) can acquire honour by aggressive behaviour, “such as physical or verbal abuse and sexual exploits, the typical ways in which Mediterranean males achieve and express their manhood.” He goes on to interpret the antitheses in their cultural setting as consisting of four elements:

(1) claim to worth or status, (2) challenge, (3) riposte [or response], and (4) public verdict. There were specific, recognisable ways to challenge someone: physical affront (kill, strike), verbal abuse (name-calling, lying), and sexual seduction of another’s wife. When honour is impugned, the man challenged should seek satisfaction, either requiring an eye for an eye or seeking revenge from his challenger ... Jesus proscribes all of these games: his disciples may not honour or challenge others for it or give a riposte if challenged. And if they have themselves challenged others, they must undo the challenge. In short, they may not play the game at all.¹¹

While there is no doubt that the antitheses should be interpreted through the prism of ancient Mediterranean honour-shame culture, male aggression in a village setting cannot account adequately for Jesus’ internalization of the law and his correction of prevailing ideas about it. The lustful look as a

¹⁰ Rohrbaugh, *Cross-cultural Perspective*, 34. The honour challenge could be met “in a variety of ways. An equal gift or compliment can be returned and a relationship has regained its equilibrium. Or a comparable insult can be offered and the playing field is level once again. Sometimes a challenge is met by a greater challenge, a slightly more expensive gift, or deeper insult, and a game of one-upmanship ensues. Challenges may be answered, brushed aside with the scorn allowed a superior, or responded to in kind, but they are never, ever, under any circumstances, to be run from or ignored.”

¹¹ J.H. Neyrey, *Honour and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 190.

weapon of aggression against another man's honour, in the form of the chastity of his wife and/or the women related to him, is not the sole point being made in Matthew 5:27-30. Jesus is challenging the *external* focus of Jewish religion, a focus that was entirely commensurate with the lack of introspection and behavioural orientation of first-century collectivist culture/s. Not only is the act of adultery sin, to look at a woman with lust is to transgress the law internally in one's heart. Unless the offending eye is "plucked out," a shameful and humiliating prospect, the even greater shame of banishment to Gehenna ("the *Valley of the Sons of Hinnom*, a ravine south of Jerusalem"¹²) looms. In other words, Jesus demands "radical sacrifice for the purpose of avoiding occasions to sin ... The lustful eye is not to be mutilated but brought into custody."¹³

The challenge to external religion is more overt in vv. 43-45a: "You have heard that it was said, 'You will love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those persecuting you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven."¹⁴ The first part, "you will love your neighbour," cites Leviticus 19:18 (cf. with the addition of "as yourself" in Matt 19:19 and 22:39). But the injunction to "hate your enemy" is not found in the Old Testament.¹⁵ Rather, it was a cultural norm that was allowed or permitted by the behavioural focus of Jewish religion.¹⁶ Again Jesus internalises the law: the perfection that God requires is the exact

¹² BDAG (W. Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [trans. W.F. Arndt and F.W. Gingrich, rev. F.W. Danker; 3rd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000]), s.v. γ• εννα. On Gehenna see K. Papaioannou, *The Geography of Hell in the Teaching of Jesus: Gehenna, Hades, the Abyss, the Outer Darkness Where There is Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2013).

¹³ W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison Jr, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (3 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988-1997), 1:523.

¹⁴ All translations from the Greek text of the New Testament are my own. Translations of passages from the Old Testament are taken from the Revised Standard Version.

¹⁵ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:549. "The closest parallels to 'hate your enemy' belong to the Dead Sea Scrolls." The injunctions to destroy utterly the nations need not be predicated on hatred (see Deut 7:2; 20:16; cf. 23:4, 7; 30:7).

¹⁶ The injunction should be regarded as "a part of general folk wisdom": W. Klassen, "Some Reflections on the Current Status of Research," in *The Love of Enemy and Nonretaliation in the New Testament* (ed. W.M. Swartley; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 12 (1-31).

opposite of the cultural response. It involves loving and praying for one's enemies (Matt 5:44).

One of the key pieces of evidence for a counter-cultural Jesus is the fifth antithesis. An "eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" (5:38) is based on the *lex talionis*, the principle of controlled retaliation as expressed in Exodus 21:23-24, Leviticus 24:19-20, and Deuteronomy 19:21.¹⁷ This was the norm for obtaining honour satisfaction when a person was injured, assaulted, or insulted. It could involve the infliction of an equivalent injury or payment of proportionate compensation (Ex 21:19, 22, 30, 32, 34). Thus, the *lex talionis* legitimised defending one's honour and seeking honour satisfaction for shame, indignity, or insult. Although Jesus does not overturn it, because God is the judge, who will repay in kind at the *eschaton*,¹⁸ he nevertheless disallows its use entirely. "But I say to you, 'Do not resist the evil person. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him also the other'" (Matt 5:39; cf. Luke 6:29). There are two probable reasons for this: (1) Like the certificate of divorce that Moses permitted because of men's hardness of heart (Matt 19:8), controlled retaliation was a concession to ancient Mediterranean culture. (2) Controlled retaliation does not work because in practice angry human beings lack control.¹⁹

Jesus rules out payback completely; but this is only the surface reading. To turn the other cheek is to reject both of the two *defining principles* of collectivist honour-shame cultures—the defence and/or pursuit of honour and the avoidance of shame. The significance of the right cheek should not be missed. A slap was "regarded as an expression of hate and an insult,"²⁰ even

¹⁷ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:540-1.

¹⁸ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:540-1. On the false idea that the antitheses prove that Jesus was opposed to the Torah (antinomistic) see B. Schaller, "The Character and Function of the Antitheses in Matt 5:21-48 in Light of Rabbinical Exegetic Disputes," in *The Sermon on the Mount in its Jewish Setting* (ed. H.-J. Becker and S. Ruzer; Cahiers de la Revue Biblique 60; Paris: Gabalda, 2005), 7-88.

¹⁹ The *lex talionis* obligated the judicial leaders of the community to repay an evil deed with punishment in kind (see Deut 19:15-21). Jesus now gives his disciples the power to respond individually to acts of evil. See D.J. Weaver, "Transforming Non-resistance: From *Lex Talionis* to 'Do Not Resist the Evil One,'" in Swartley, *Love of Enemy and Nonretaliation*, 32-71, esp. 56-57.

²⁰ U. Luz, *Matthew 1-7* (trans. J.E. Crouch; Hermeneia; rev. ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 272.

more so when delivered with the left hand, the unclean toilet hand.²¹ Along the same lines, a back-handed slap delivered with the right hand smacks of intentional insult or challenge, perhaps this is why the Mishnah required a double penalty to satisfy honour (*m. Baba Qamma* 8.6). Both scenarios represent “a challenge in the most insulting form possible.”²² In response, disciples are to offer the other cheek which, in cultural terms, is a very shameful thing for a man to do. In this one saying Jesus formulates *two new principles* which are to replace the two defining principles of collectivist honour-shame culture/s: (1) the defence (and pursuit: see below) of honour, whether via retaliation or compensation, is to be completely renounced; and (2) shame is not to be avoided at any cost but to be passively received and, indeed, embraced.

Davies and Allison point to a number of “intriguing parallels” between Matthew 5:38-42 par. and Isaiah 50:4-11 (the third “servant song”), including shared vocabulary.²³ In vv. 5-6 the servant describes his response to the shaming and rejection that he received at the hands of his fellows. “I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I hid not my face from shame and spitting.”²⁴ Thus, the servant (vv. 10-11) is identified as a prophet (vv. 4-9) whose challenging message is rejected in emphatic cultural terms.²⁵ That was also the case with Jeremiah whose book contains a number of confessions (or laments) about the reception his words

²¹ Neyrey, *Honour and Shame*, 205.

²² Neyrey, *Honour and Shame*, 205.

²³ Both “Matt 5:38-42 and Isa 50:4-11 depict the unjust treatment of an innocent individual and use the terminology of the law court”: D.C. Allison Jr, *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination* Companions to the New Testament; New York: Crossroad, 1999), 21. The vocabulary common to Matthew and the LXX are: *anthistēmi* (Isa 50:8; Matt 5:39); *didōmi* (Isa 50:4, 6; Matt 5:42); *siagōn* (Isa 50:6; Matt 5:39); *rhapizō* (Isa 50:6; Matt 5:30); *apostrophō* (Isa 50:6; Matt 5:42); *krinō* (Isa 50:8; Matt 5:40); *himation* (Isa 50:9; Matt 5:40), Davies, and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.544. Two of these words “appear again in the passion narrative – ‘strike’ (*rhapizō*, 26:67), and ‘cloak/clothes’ (27:31, 35)” (Allison, *Sermon on the Mount*, 21).

²⁴ M.D. Goulder, *Midrash and Lection in Matthew* (London: SPCK, 1974), 293-94, argues that Matt 5:39 is “a development of Isa 50:6 [LXX].”

²⁵ J. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah: a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible 19A; Garden City: Doubleday, 2002), 118-20, 317-23; cf. L.-S. Tiemeyer, *For the Comfort of Zion: the Geographical and Theological Location of Isaiah 40-55* (Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 139; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 311-29, esp. 317, 323-27.

had garnered (11:18-12:6; 15:10-21; 17:14-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-13; 20:14-18).²⁶

Regardless of whether Lamentations can be attributed to Jeremiah or not,²⁷ it encapsulates the reception that the prophets experienced, and the passive response that God required of them.

He drove into my heart the arrows of his quiver; I have become a laughing-stock of all peoples, the burden of their songs all day long ... But this I call to mind and therefore I have hope ... The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man that he bears the yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone in silence when he has laid it on him; let him put his mouth in the dust – there may yet be hope; let him give his cheek [*siagona*] to the smiter, and be filled with insults (Lam 3:13-14, 21, 25-30).²⁸

The parallel in v. 30 was first noted by Origen in his response to Celsus (*Contra Celsus* 7.25). The same *silent* embrace of shaming and ostracism, the same passive reception of persecution, is found in the fourth servant song of Isaiah 52:13-53:1, “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a sheep that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth” (Isa 53:7).

As far as Jesus is concerned, when a personal challenge comes (institutions are not addressed here²⁹), there can be no riposte. Instead of

²⁶ See A.R. Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context: Scenes of Prophetic Drama* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Suppl. 45; Sheffield: JSOT, 1987). Part of the fifth confession reads, “O LORD, you have deceived me, and I was deceived; you are stronger than me, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughing-stock all the day; every one mocks me. For whenever I speak, I cry out, I shout, ‘Violence and destruction?’ For the word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and derision all the day long” (Jer 20:7-8).

²⁷ See J.H. Hayes, “The Songs of Israel: Psalms and Lamentations,” in *The Hebrew Bible Today: An Introduction to Critical Issues* (ed. S.L. McKenzie and M.P. Graham; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 167-68 (153-72). Cf. H.A. Thomas, “A Survey of Research on Lamentations (2002-2012),” *Currents in Biblical Research* 12 (2012): 10-13 (8-38).

²⁸ Cf. “He has torn me in his wrath, and hated me ... Men have gaped at me with their mouth, they struck me insolently upon the cheek [*siagona*], they mass themselves together against me” (Job 16:9-10; cf. 16:7-8, 11; 17:2, 6). On the use of Lam 3 elsewhere in Matthew see D.M. Moffitt, “Righteous Bloodshed, Matthew’s Passion Narrative, and the Temple’s Destruction: Lamentations as a Matthean Intertext,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125 (2006): 299-320.

²⁹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:542.

defending honour in order to assuage shame, his followers are to embrace shame and dishonour, even if it means losing one's clothes and dignity (Matt 5:40; cf. Luke 6:29b). This is a new standard that requires nothing less than the renunciation of cultural manhood. Jesus is a cultural revolutionary who issues an extraordinary challenge.³⁰ He grew up in a collectivist honour-shame culture and would have been expected to conform. But he refused to do so because the two defining principles of honour-shame culture/s are not principles of the kingdom of heaven.³¹

2. Correcting the Cultural Covenant

The Jewish religious leaders seem to have joined culture onto religion, as though the two were compatible. If one had no ascribed honour via birth or endowment, one might seek to acquire honour or status via religious office.³² The scribes and Pharisees “do all their deeds to be seen by people ... and they love the place of honour at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues, and salutations in the market places, and being called rabbi by people” (Matt 23:5a, 6-7; cf. Mark 12:38-39; Luke 20:46). According to Luke, even after the disciples had spent some years with Jesus, the undercurrent at the Last Supper was one of jostling for the pre-eminent position (22:24-27; cf. Mark 10:41-45; Matt 20:24-28). Apparently, that was also the reason for the foot

³⁰ See S.S. Bartchy, “The Historical Jesus and Reversal of Honour at Table,” in Stegemann, *Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels*, 175-84. On comparable sayings in Jewish sources see G.M. Zerbe, *Non-retaliation in Early Jewish and New Testament Texts: Ethical Themes in Social Context* (Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Suppl. 13; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 39-44. While he notes that the “general exhortation to suffer injustice, without retaliating, is widespread in antiquity,” Luz also observes that the demands of vv. 39b-41 contain “an element of intentional provocation ... They alienate, they shock, they protest symbolically against the standard use of force ... They are an expression against dehumanising spirals of violence and of the hope for a different kind of behaviour than what can be experienced in everyday life. They do stop there, however, because they demand active behaviour, in which there is both an element of protest and an element of provocative contrast against the force used to rule the world” (*Matthew*, 273-74).

³¹ “There is no direct reference to the kingdom of God” in vv. 39a-41, nevertheless “the contrast between the kingdom of God and the world” emerges from them (Luz, *Matthew*, 274).

³² Honour “is tied to the symbols of power, sexual status, gender, and religion”: K.C. Hanson, “How Honourable! How Shameful! A Cultural Analysis of Matthew’s Makarisms and Reproaches,” in *Honour and Shame in the World of the Bible* (ed. V.H. Matthews and D.C. Benjamin; *Semeia* 68; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1996), 83 (81-111).

washing in which Jesus takes on the persona and performs the task of a house slave (John 13:4-5, 12-17). The message that Jesus was trying to convey was that pride and self-exaltation, which are at the heart of the honour principle, are to be renounced.

That Jesus could not get this through to his disciples after a considerable period of constant association speaks volumes about the love of honour, power of conformity, and lack of introspection in collectivist culture/s. That is why the cross was needed. It represents an entire renunciation (of the pursuit) of honour and embracing of shame.³³ The two new principles of the kingdom required Jesus to take everything that was done to him in silence and without fleshly retaliation (see Mark 14:53-65). If he had conformed to culture by defending his honour – that is, if he had been a cultural Jew – then he himself would need a Saviour. This point must be made in unequivocal terms or missiology will serve culture instead of God.

Jesus models how to live a God-honouring life in an honour-shame culture. The general Jewish focus on externals is very evident in the plethora of halakhic laws concerning Sabbath observance and ritual purity.³⁴ Jesus violates scribal and Pharisaic tradition again and again by healing on the Sabbath,³⁵ associating with prostitutes and tax collectors, and touching the unclean. But his greatest sin was more cultural than legal. In a collectivist culture, in which authority (in this case, religious authority) is accepted and

³³ For a discussion of the cross in relation to honour and shame see J.H. Neyrey, “Despising the Shame of the Cross: Honour and Shame in the Johannine Passion Narrative,” in Matthews and Benjamin, *Honour and Shame*, 113-37. “In the evangelist’s eyes, Jesus’ shame and humiliation is truly the account of his glory: ‘Ought not the Christ suffer, and so enter into his glory?’ (Luke 24:26; see Acts 14:22; Heb 2:10). Indeed, in the fourth gospel, his death is regularly described as glory and glorification (John 7:39; 12:28; 17:5; see 21:19). Or, to paraphrase Paul, foolishness, weakness, and shame in human eyes are wisdom, strength, and honour in God’s eyes (1 Cor 1:20, 25)” (118-19).

³⁴ On the former see L. Doering, “Sabbath and Festivals,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine* (ed. C. Hezser; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 566-86. On the latter see J. Klawans, “Moral and Ritual Purity,” in *The Historical Jesus in Context* (ed. A.-J. Levine, D.C. Allison Jr, and J.D. Crossan; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 265-84.

³⁵ See L. Doering, “Much Ado about Nothing?: Jesus’ Sabbath Healings and their Halakhic Implications Revisited,” in *Judaistik und Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft: Standorte – Grenzen – Beziehungen* (ed. L. Doering, H.-G. Waubke, and F. Willk; Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments 226; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2008), 213-41.

there is reluctance to disagree with one's superiors, to disregard and even reprove³⁶ the Jewish religious leaders was completely unacceptable.³⁷ Because shame is to be avoided at all costs, there can be no reproof of sins in a collectivist setting. In six-and-a-half years in Papua New Guinea, every sermon that I heard, with only one exception, conformed to this cultural imperative. But, again, Jesus refuses to conform and in doing so models incarnational ministry.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew's Jesus understands where honouring God will lead. "Blessed are you whenever they would revile and persecute you [plural] and would speak every evil thing against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt 5:11-12). This was the experience of the prophets who, in their time, reproved the sins of the children of Israel.³⁸ The form of this ninth beatitude is different to the eight which precede it because it acts as a bridge to vv. 13-16 and the antitheses which are followed by an admonition to love one's enemies in vv. 43-48. In other words, the "enemies" to be loved are the very ones persecuting God's servants because of *their* righteousness (5:10; cf. 23:34-35; 1 Pet 3:14).³⁹ Remarkably, this is the greatest blessing that God can bestow: participation in the life of Christ through the experience of persecution at the hands of God's professed people. Such persecution is to be received as Jesus admonishes, by turning the other cheek and not resisting evil.

³⁶ See, e.g., Matt 21:1-36; cf. 1 Tim 5:20; 2 Tim 2:1-5; Titus 2:15; Rev 3:19.

³⁷ That is why, *contra* Doering ("Much Ado about Nothing?", 228), Mark 3:6 is historically plausible. The Jewish religious leaders had to defend their honour in the face of Jesus' repeated refusals to submit to their authority.

³⁸ See D.R.A. Hare, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel According to Matthew* (Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 6; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 137-141. Cf. "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, saying 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' Thus you witness against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets" (Matt 23:29-31).

³⁹ As Davies and Allison (*Matthew*, 1:459-60) point out, "'righteousness' here can only be something people have, namely, their obedient, righteous conduct; 'justification' and 'vindication' are both excluded. So in 5.10 'righteousness' has demonstrably to do with God's demand, not God's gift."

The Abrahamic covenant in its various reiterations declares no blessing for the persecuted. Instead, it was conducive to a cultural interpretation. Job was honoured in cultural terms, like a Melanesian “big man,” as one blessed of God (see Job 29:2-3, 7-11, 24-25). When the blessings were removed and he was humbled by God, his emboldened comforters accused him of iniquity. Only if he were sinful, could his humiliation be explained. He responded by defending his moral integrity, but could not understand why God had rewarded his righteous conduct with shaming. In other words, Job had the same idea about the covenant as his accusers, that righteous conduct would be rewarded with covenant blessings in the form of possessions, wealth, and honour.⁴⁰ As a result, he could not understand why God had abandoned him (see Job 16:7-11, 20; 17:2, 6). The book of Job is an examination of the idea that covenant obedience results in cultural honour and its accoutrements, wealth, material possessions, and status. Therefore, it may well have been another source of Jesus’ philosophy of turning the other cheek.⁴¹

Jesus turns the cultural interpretation of the covenant on its head.⁴² It is not the wealthy and honoured, but the poor (in spirit) and those who hunger (for righteousness) – i.e., those of low status and public standing – who are blessed (Luke 6:20-21; cf. Matt 5:3, 6).⁴³ In this context, as Neyrey observes, the blessing (*makarios*) takes on the cultural meaning of “esteemed” or “honoured.” Thus, the four makarisms or blessings that might be traceable to the hypothetical sayings source Q (Luke 6:20-22; cf. Matt 5:3, 4, 6, 11)

⁴⁰ Cf. A.M. Mbuvi, “The Ancient Mediterranean Values of ‘Honour and Shame’ as a Hermeneutical Lens of Reading the Book of Job,” *Old Testament Essays* 23 (2010): 752-68, esp. 765, 767.

⁴¹ See Job 16:9-10 cited in n. 28.

⁴² Note that Paul does exactly the same. See, e.g., 1 Cor 4:8-13. See M. Finney, “Conflict and Honour in the Ancient World: Some Thoughts on the Social Problems behind 1 Corinthians,” *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 29 (2006): 24-56; D.S. Levasheff, “Jesus of Nazareth, Paul of Tarsus, and the Early Christian Challenge to Traditional Honour and Shame Values” (PhD diss., University of California, 2013), available at <<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/1cf4r8sd>>; cf. J.H. Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honour in Roman Philippi: Carmen Christi as Cursus Pudorum* (Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 132; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁴³ “Although ‘poor’ has a spiritual meaning in 5:3, it has a more-literal sense elsewhere in Matthew, in 11:5; 19:21; 26:9, 11” (Allison, *Sermon on the Mount*, 45). For the meaning of “rich” and “poor” in the New Testament context see B.J. Malina, “Wealth and Poverty in the New Testament and its World,” *Interpretation* 41 (1987): 354-67.

“contain an oxymoron: ‘How honourable are those who suffer a loss of honour.’”⁴⁴ Neyrey argues that the

four makarisms describe the composite fate of a disciple who has been ostracised as a “rebellious son” by his family for loyalty to Jesus. This ostracism entails total loss of all economic support from the family (food, clothing, shelter), as well as total loss of honour and status in the eyes of the village (a good name, marriage prospects, etc.). Such persons would be “shameful” in the eyes of the family and village, but Jesus proclaims them “honourable” (*makarioi*).⁴⁵

That may be the reason for the first and second makarisms, the blessings pronounced on the poor, and on those who mourn (Matt 5:4).⁴⁶

However, once again, the family and village setting, though very culturally apt, does not do complete justice to the wider context of Jesus as the new Moses standing on a mountain⁴⁷ and exposing the cultural practice of religion (5:1-2). That is why, in the case of the fourth makarism (5:11), public shaming by cultural religionists is in view. By implication, those who participate in shaming behaviour – an obligation placed on all, when a Melanesian big man or big men declare it to be necessary – are like those who shamed and persecuted the prophets and Jesus himself. In the same way, they will persecute those followers of Christ whose light cannot be hidden, whose righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees (5:13-20). As Jeremias observes, in referring to the backhanded slap to the right cheek,

⁴⁴ J.H. Neyrey, “Loss of Wealth, Loss of Family, Loss of Honour: The Cultural Context of the Original Makarisms in Q,” in *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-scientific Studies of the New Testament in its Context* (ed. P.F. Esler; London: Routledge, 1995), 140 (139-58), reproduced as “Honouring the Dishonoured: The Cultural Edge of Jesus’ Beatitudes”, at <<http://www3.nd.edu/~jneyrey1/loss.html>>; cf. Hanson, “How Honourable! How Shameful!”, 81-111; D.F. Watson, *Honour Among Christians: The Cultural Key to the Messianic Secret* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 63-85.

⁴⁵ Neyrey, “Loss of Wealth,” 140.

⁴⁶ Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 45-47; Neyrey, “Loss of Wealth,” 140-44, esp. 143.

⁴⁷ See D.C. Allison Jr, *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); M.P. Theophilus, *Jesus as New Moses in Matthew 8-9: Jewish Typology in First-century Greek Literature* (Perspectives on Philosophy and Religious Thought 4; Piscataway: Gorgias, 2013).

“Jesus is not speaking of a simple insult. It is much more the case of a quite-specific insulting blow: the blow given to the disciples of Jesus as heretics.”⁴⁸

The allusions in the Beatitudes to Isaiah 61:1-3 also give these words an eschatological edge.⁴⁹ Jesus is the anointed one, the Messiah, whose ministry brings blessings and divides siblings and parents and children (Matt 10:21). “You will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of man comes” (vv. 22-23).⁵⁰ Jesus was meek, merciful, and righteous, he mourned and fulfilled all righteousness, and he was reviled and persecuted. “He embodies his own words and thereby becomes the standard or model to be imitated.”⁵¹

JESUS AND MELANESIAN “BIG MAN” CULTURE

In the context of the Last Supper, the author of the Gospel of John picks up a motif that is common to all four gospels, that of the disciple as a *slave*. Jesus “rose from the supper, laid aside his garments (*himatia*; cf. 19:23), and taking a *lention* girded himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the *lention*, with which he was girded” (John 13:4-5). The word *lention* is not used in the Septuagint (LXX) or New Testament. John took it from the Graeco-Roman symposium, and it

⁴⁸ J. Jeremias, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Ethel M. Wood Lecture; London: Athlone, 1961), 27. “It is true that this is not specifically stated, but it follows from the observation that in every instance where Jesus speaks of insult, persecution, anathema, dishonour to the disciples, he is concerned with outrages that arise because of the discipleship itself” (27-28).

⁴⁹ R.A. Guelich, “The Matthean Beatitudes: ‘Entrance Requirements’ or Eschatological Blessings?”, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95 (1976): 415-34, esp. 427-31; Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 15-17; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:466-67, 436-39.

⁵⁰ It is important to note how much of the material in Matthew 10 “is concerned with the non-acceptance of the gospel and the hostility with which the missionaries are treated. There is no instruction regarding what is to be done with converts in a successful mission!” (Hare, *Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians*, 98). On the possible *Sitz im Leben* of 10:16-33, see 96-114. While the focus here is the finished text of Matthew, for a useful discussion of redactional criticism in relation to Matt 5-7 see R.A. Guelich, “Interpreting the Sermon on the Mount,” *Interpretation* 41 (1987): 117-30.

⁵¹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:467.

occurs widely in that context in ancient documents.⁵² Slaves wore a *lention* (linen cloth) while serving the guests during the meal. Jesus was making a radical socio-cultural statement that would have been understood by all who were present: the master was assuming the role of a domestic or house slave. Peter's reaction both confirms this and shows that in cultural terms it was completely unacceptable (v. 6).

By this inversion of roles Jesus again teaches something revolutionary.

So when he had washed their feet, and taken his garments and reclined again, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, you also should do. Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave (*doulos*) is not greater than his master; nor is an apostle greater than the one having sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you would do them" (vv. 12-17).

The disciples were not to copy Jesus by washing each other's feet. They were to follow his example by adopting the persona of slaves; by renouncing any kind of domination of one member of the community over others. Jesus is putting forward a kingdom principle: a community of faith in which there is one Lord and Master. All others, like their master, are slaves of one another. Thus, Jesus completely rejects demonstrations of status, reputation, and position in the church, along with the use of cultural or "big man" authority.⁵³

The same kingdom principle is found in the Gospel of Matthew. The scribes and Pharisees love to be "called rabbi by people. But you are not to be called rabbi, for one of you is the Teacher, but you are all brothers ... And do

⁵² See A. Destro, and M. Pesce, "The Colour of the Words: The Domestic Slavery in John – from 'Social Death' to Freedom in the Household," in Arzt-Grabner and Kreinecker, *Light from the East*, 27-46. Destro and Pesce identify the social and relational context/s of slavery in John. The household with its masters and slave, is fundamental to John's understanding of the master-disciple relationship. In washing the disciples' feet, Jesus assumes the role of a slave (*doulos*). The tunic, basin, *lention*, and foot washing were all elements in the Graeco-Roman welcome performed by slaves. So when Jesus adopts the demeanour of a slave, cultural master-disciple roles are inverted. He then invites all of his disciples to take the same servile stance in relation to each other.

⁵³ The meaning of "meek" (*praus*) in Matt 5:5 is explained by the use of the same word in 11:29. Jesus himself is "meek and lowly in heart." Cf. Danker: "not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance" (BDAG, s.v. *πραῦς*).

not be called teachers,⁵⁴ because one of you is teacher, the Christ. The one who is greatest among you will be your attendant (*diakonos*);⁵⁵ and whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (23:5-8, 10-12). The table attendants at the wedding at Cana are called *diakonoi* (John 2:5, 9), as are the members of the king’s retinue in Matthew 22:13.

In Matthew 20:25b-28, *diakonos* and *doulos* (slave) are used in parallel.

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It will not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you, he will be your *diakonos*, and whoever wants to be first among you, he will be your *doulos*; even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Unlike a “servant”, an anachronistic translation which comes to us from Jacobean and Elizabethan England via the English translation known as the King James Version, a slave in the ancient world was the property of and wholly subject to his/her owner.⁵⁶

The same motif is present in Paul. We are bought with a price (1 Cor 6:19) and belong to God. “For he who was called in the Lord as a *doulos* is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a *doulos* of Christ. You were bought with a price” (7:22-23; cf. Eph 6:6). Thus, in the book of Revelation: God reveals things to his slaves (*douloi*) (22:6); they get his seal on their foreheads (7:3); and they will serve him in the new earth (22:3), where they will see his face and his name will be written on their foreheads (22:4). And finally, coming back to John’s gospel, slaves, who love one another in imitation of Jesus’ example, are his friends (15:12-16). As far as authenticity is concerned, all of these diverse examples are evidence for a

⁵⁴ BDAG, s.v. καθιγηγητής (*kathēgētēs*).

⁵⁵ Danker translates *diakonos* as “attendant, assistant, aide” (BDAG, s.v. διάκονος [*diakonos*]). The “English derivatives ‘deacon’ and ‘deaconess’ are technical terms whose meaning varies in ecclesiastical history and are therefore inadequate for rendering New Testament usage” of *diakonos*.

⁵⁶ It should be noted, however, that slavery is a complex phenomenon that resists simplistic generalisations: see K. Bradley, “Engaging with Slavery,” *Biblical Interpretation* 21 (2013): 533-46. See also the essay responses to Bradley’s work on slavery in the same journal by J.A. Glancy, J.A. Harrill, S. Briggs, and S.S. Bartchy). Cf. S.S. Bartchy, “Slave, Slavery,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments* (ed. R.P. Martin and P.H. Davids; Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1997), 1098-102.

teaching that originated with Jesus. In addition, the counter-cultural nature of the teaching points to a divine origin. How else could a man who grew up in an ancient Mediterranean culture, where honour was to be sought with as much concerted effort as shame was to be avoided, teach such a thing?

In view of such instruction, what impression would be conveyed if theological students were intent on seeking the best seat, if they thought that they were better than students doing other degrees? What if they thought that religious office brought with it honour and status? Or that because of such acquired honour they were above the members of their congregations? How then could they draw near to their members and reach their hearts? Sadly, in my experience most will not, because this is how the great majority of theological students think and act.

What impression would be conveyed if theological students and/or pastors were enthralled by “big man” politicians and businessmen, and were often seen in their retinues among those seeking to ingratiate themselves? Would that mean that they aspired to be big men or coveted the status/honour that is given to big men? If so, that would mean that they had put aside the many biblical passages that condemn pride and all demonstrations of it. Could such pastors hold politicians and businessmen to account even while ingratiating themselves? In my experience they could not and will not, simply because this is how many pastors think and act.

Big man culture in the Christian churches of Melanesia misrepresents Jesus. As one conscientious pastor told me, “We are in big trouble.” He had gone back out to his village and preached against big man culture in the church. The local church members rejected his message. In this case, and many others, culture is thought to be fully compatible with Jesus. It is a “sacred cow” that cannot be criticised. This is because Melanesian identity is found in collectivist culture. A “big man” pastor once said to me after I had preached against culture, “You left us nowhere to turn.” As I later came to realise, that response was rooted in a genuine fear of loss of identity. Where will Melanesians turn, if they must renounce the two defining principles of their culture? That is a hard question and it requires a genuine answer.

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Church members in Papua New Guinea are Christians and believe that they now know the truth. Yet the desire to identify with and live according to

tradition is not removed. It simply has a new focus. As a result, the pioneers, the first Christian missionaries to Papua New Guinea, are venerated. They are the sainted founders, infallible and inerrant in teaching and practice. What they taught is now the tradition that is to be passed on. Thus, students tend to come to their theological studies with the feeling that they already know everything they need to know.

They know that when they finish their studies they will preach what has always been preached. If they are shown that what the pioneer missionaries taught about this or that biblical passage is incorrect, they can be very confronted. But even though they may recognise that what they are hearing is true, after they graduate they will join in preaching what has always been preached. Many students have intimated as much to me. They will not risk the censure of their fellow pastors and the shaming that would result from being labelled apostate. What the church community or collective thinks of them is more important than a correct understanding of any particular biblical passage. That is, they do not have the courage to preach anything that is contrary to church tradition.

Students in general receive the Christian message as tradition from their parents or pastors. Almost invariably, they have no basis for their belief except what they have been told by their authoritative elders. At the start of a class on the early Pauline letters, I asked the students to raise their hands, if they had ever read through the Pauline letters and tried to understand them. Not one hand moved. Their belief was not based on a searching of the Bible and a knowledge of the historical evidence. You may say to me, clearly not, since this is not a literate society. I would respond by saying that tertiary students are literate and, therefore, have a greater responsibility. The repercussions are not difficult to understand. As one pastor with considerable field experience told me, "We do not own the gospel. We preach what we have been given by foreign missionaries. Now I see that we must understand and own the gospel for ourselves."

From a soteriological perspective, the situation is even more disturbing. "Christian" lifestyle is often based on church culture/tradition and is not the result of a changed heart. For six years I taught a Gospels class to hundreds of first-year students from many denominations. In the early years when numbers were lower, students would write a journal as one of the assessment tasks. Many told me in their journals that they expected that baptism would change them. I am referring to baptism by immersion which usually occurs in

the teenage years after a series of Bible studies with a pastor. But they rose from the watery grave not into a new life, but to continue their old life with their old sinful habits unrestrained. They had not sought God until they were found by him, they did not encounter Christ in truth, they were not born again. Instead, their “faith” was something that they had received and adhered to as tradition because that was what was expected of them.

Several years ago one of my Gospels students came to tell me about the circumstances in which she had become a Christian. Though baptised six years prior, she confessed that she had only become a Christian during the previous week late at night in the prayer room in the girl’s dormitory. As she “wrestled” with God, she experienced what she described as the “breaking within.” Her heart was torn open and filled with the indescribable love of God. She was justified and reborn through an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The old heart of stone was replaced with a new heart of flesh through the supernatural working of the all-powerful One.⁵⁷ This is what is not understood in Papua New Guinea: (1) the old heart of stone *is* the cultural heart; (2) the cultural heart must be changed; and (3) preachers must have the conviction and courage to say that in no uncertain terms.

But, in actuality, the great majority of clergy are very loath to speak against any aspect of culture, even if it is completely condemned by Jesus. Again, what the collective or Christian community thinks is more important than the teaching and example of Jesus. For example, while it may have been preached, I have never heard a sermon against the cultural rule that a young woman cannot say no when a young man demands sex (the reader can probably deduce which gender made up that rule). Yet Jesus and Paul insist that they must say “no.” “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from *porneias* (sexual immorality); that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honour, not in the passion of lust like heathen who do not know God” (1 Thess 4:3-5).⁵⁸ This is the power

⁵⁷ The Sermon on the Mount “is spoken to men who have already received forgiveness, who have found the pearl of great price, who have been invited to the wedding, who through their faith in Jesus belong to the new creation, to the new world of God ... [Jesus says], ‘I intend to show you, by means of some examples, what the new life is like, and what I show you through these examples, this you must apply to every aspect of life’” (Jeremias, *Sermon on the Mount*, 30-31).

⁵⁸ This is one of two translations proffered by Danker in BDAG, s.v. κτάομαι (*ktaomai*), σκευ•ς (*skeuos*).

of culture, the siren song of conformity that very few seem to be able to resist.⁵⁹

I can say these things, but charges of neo-colonialism are easy to make, no matter how cogent the case. What is needed are Melanesian theologians and biblical scholars who are able to both engage with and critique culture, who are willing to ask and provide answers for hard questions. Only then will theological students really listen. What I, as an outsider of European descent, have to say is not important. What the Bible says is slightly more important. But what culture says is most important. That is because identity and its potential loss are at stake. Only Melanesians can forge a new identity in God and scripture.⁶⁰ That is where Jesus found his identity.

In my opinion, the best way to bring about such a change is through theological education. How we do theological education is not merely an academic question, it is a soteriological question. We cannot afford to get it wrong. Nothing is more important than salvation, not religious tradition, however hoary with age, and not even culture, no matter how important it may seem to be for identity and place in the world. “Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s foes will be those of his own household” (Matt 10:34-39).

CONCLUSION

The teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is revolutionary in the most profound, counter-cultural way. Shame is to be embraced and the honour principle – including the norms of cultural manhood – is to be renounced. Conformity and regard for authority must be subordinated to gospel obedience. The Abrahamic covenant was conducive to a cultural interpretation. When the disciples heard how hard it was for a rich man to enter heaven, they asked, “Who then can be saved?” (Luke 19:25). Jesus turns the cultural covenant on its head. It is not the wealthy and honourable,

⁵⁹ Sirens were the female creatures of Greek myth whose almost irresistible song would lure sailors to their deaths on the rocks.

⁶⁰ For a good place to start see S.S. Bartchy, “Undermining Ancient Patriarchy: The Apostle Paul’s Vision of a Society of Siblings,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 29 (1999): 68-78.

but the poor (in spirit) and hungry (for righteousness) who are blessed (Matt 5:3, 6; cf. Luke 6:20-21).

Jesus' example requires the exposure of cultural religion, with the explicit warning that to do so will bring persecution. Those who are prepared to speak out against cultural sins will be shamed and cast out by family and village and church. But Jesus says "Blessed are you whenever they would revile and persecute you [plural] and would speak every evil thing against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven" (Matt 5:11-12). Paradoxically, shaming and persecution by cultural religionists is a greater blessing than anything that the Abrahamic covenant might provide. Jesus overthrows the two defining principles of honour-shame culture. The greatest blessing of God is not to be honoured with status, position, and wealth, but the honour that he gives to the dishonoured, the honour that he gives to those whom culture would reject and shame.