Vol. 13, No. 2 1997

MELANESIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools

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Cover design by Br Jeff Daly CP, and John Kua

ISSN 0256-856X Volume 13, Number 2 1997

ADDRESS (Editorial and Subscription):
Melanesian Journal of Theology
Christian Leaders' Training College
PO Box 382 Mt Hagen WHP
Papua New Guinea

MELANESIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

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

The *Melanesian Journal of Theology* is ecumenical, and it is committed to the dialogue of Christian faith with Melanesian cultures. The Editors will consider for publication all manuscripts of scholarly standard on matters of concern to Melanesian Christians, and of general theological interest. Manuscripts should be typed, double-spaced and in duplicate.

The opinions expressed in the articles, book reviews, etc., are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the editors or the member colleges of MATS.

The *Melanesian Journal of Theology* normally appears twice yearly, in April and October.

Editorial Team:	**Jamie O'Brien** **Revd Rod Macready** **Russell Thorp** All of Christian Leaders' Training College
Production:	**Max Edwards** Christian Leaders' Training College
Subscriptions:	**Revd Rod Macready** Christian Leaders' Training College

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EDITORIAL

Once again, the articles in this issue deal with topics of current concern to the churches in Melanesia. It is hoped that they will also be of interest to our overseas readers, and of benefit to the wider study of theology.

Within many cultures, the transitions of life are important. Churches in the West often see these transition points (such as birth, marriage, and death) as opportunities for the presentation of the gospel. At such points, people are usually open to consider the larger realities of existence. In our first article, Russell Thorp asks the question: "Can primal funeral rites be used in some way to convey a Christian message?" He seeks to answer this question through an examination of one example from Melanesian culture.

Our second article is related to the topic of marriage, but not at the actual point of transition. Polygamy is an issue, with which many churches struggle within Melanesia. One pastor recently commented to me that the men in his church have been known to "backslide", in order to marry an extra wife. Once the marriage has been formalised, the man will make suitable acts of repentance and recommitment. Noki Pep introduces some of the issues that are still current, within the debates about polygamy, within the church. He also encourages the church to consider ways of ministering to those who are involved in polygamy, and related family problems.

Our third article deals with the topic of premillennialism. As Greg Schiller notes, this topic is quite popular within Papua New Guinea. In the past, there have been many groups within the country, who have emphasised, and often distorted, the Bible's teaching concerning the return of Jesus. Some of these groups have been short-lived; others have lasted longer. Some have attracted few followers; others have accumulated quite a gathering. With the approach of the year 2000, new groups and

new distortions are joining the ranks (and not only within Melanesia). It is appropriate that this topic be highlighted at this point in time.

Our final article concerns the topic of suffering. This is a topic that interests humanity, mainly because of our experience. Recently, the country of Papua New Guinea has suffered the disaster of a tidal wave at Aitape. While those in the region suffered directly, as a result of this earthquake-induced tidal wave, there are very few in the country, who are not touched, in some way, by this tragedy. The article by James O'Brien was not written with the Aitape calamity in mind. Yet, it is a timely reminder of some of the biblical principles that are involved in our thinking on this issue.

Once again, we would apologise that we are behind schedule in the production of the Journal. We thank you for your patience with us. This issue was almost ready in early February, but a series of circumstances has delayed its completion for another six months.

Rodney Macready.

Melanesian Journal of Theology 13-2 (1997)

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND THE LIVING DEAD

Russell Thorp

Russell Thorp is a New Zealander, who was born in Papua New Guinea. He holds a Bachelor of Ministries from the Bible College of New Zealand. He is currently teaching at the Christian Leaders' Training College. The following article was written as part of a Master's degree program.

Question: Can primal funeral rites be used in some way to convey a Christian message? To explore this issue we will compare the funeral rites of a Papuan cultural group with those of an African group.[1]

I will first summarise the African funeral ceremony, as Don Brown relates it in his article. Then I will describe and analyse the funeral ritual of the "Dugum Dani",[2] a Papuan culture in the Highlands of Western Papua New Guinea.[3] Once we have a picture of both rituals, we will then use the work of Arnold Van Gennep[4] and Ronald Grimes[5] to analyse the Dugum Dani ritual. By then, we will be able to draw on our findings, to work out if some aspects of the Dugum Dani funeral rites can be used in conveying a Christian message.

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[1] Don Brown, "The African Funeral Ceremony: Stumbling Block or Redemptive Analogy?", in *International Journal for Frontier Missions* 2-3 (July 1985), p. 255.

[2] It has since come to the attention of the author of this article that the name of the tribal group is now recognised as the Dugum Lani people.

[3] Karl G. Heider, *The Dugum Dani*, New York NY: Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, 1970.

[4] Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, Paris Fr: Waterson, Roxana, 1909.

[5] Ronald L. Grimes, cited by Calvin W. Conkey, "The Malay Funeral Rite: A Ritual Analysis", in *International Journal for Frontier Missions* 9-2 (April 1992), p. 47.

The African Funeral Ceremony

Don Brown's article focuses on the funeral ceremony, or *kilio*, after the death of a married man.[6] The dying man is removed from his house, to a temporary hut. Burial will take place the same day as death occurs. The funeral is organised by the deceased's oldest brother, the *Mwesi*. He initiates, and completes, the grave digging, with a short hoe. Family and friends do the bulk of the digging with normal-length hoes. "The corpse is placed in the grave on its right side, facing the rising sun."[7] A cow hide, cut so that the flesh and bones remain below the knee joints, is used to cover the body.

The short hoe is thrown into the forest, or down an ant hill, by the *Mwesi* after the grave is filled in. He then bathes in the river, followed by the other men in the burial party. The widow then bathes, but only up to her waist. The other women now bathe normally. Brown points out that bathing can only take place, communally, during the *kilio*, as a communal event.[8] On returning home, the women sprinkle cool water on all the physical items that belonged to the deceased, all of which have been placed outside the deceased's house for this purpose. On the night of the burial, a *Mwesha* (sanctifier), from a remote tribe, is brought by the relatives to sleep with the widow.

The day after the burial marks the beginning of the official mourning period, which lasts for five to eight days. "On the first morning, the *Mwesha* comes out holding his throat, as if he were choking."[9] The widow stays seated indoors, only speaking to the widows, who are serving her. The *Mwesha* returns late on the fifth day. He shaves the heads of the widow, and her sons, and then sleeps with the widow again. He leaves the next morning.

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[6] Brown, "African Funeral Ceremony", p. 257.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

The widow is then told by the *Mwesi* to wash all her body in the river, to wash off all her husband's sweat. "She returns to the house, and, once again, bows her head, as the *Mwesi* declares that 'the house has been overcome'. The widow's bed is now let down to the floor."[10]

On the sixth day, a white cock is killed at the entrance to the house. The fresh blood is sprinkled outside, while the feathers are taken to the crossroads of two paths and left there. All the mourners bathe. During the morning, the widow comes out of her house, with her head up, and grief over. The *Mwesha* comes back again. "That night he takes the widow out to the bush, and sleeps with her for the third, and final, time. After a short ceremony, in which the widow is inherited by her husband's brother, or by one of the children, all are free to go home. The funeral is over."[11]

In order to analyse the funeral rites, Brown uses the work done by Van Gennep, on rites of passage. Van Gennep has pointed out that all rites of passage have three stages:

1. *Separation*, indicated by symbolic acts, depicting detachment from an earlier state.
2. *Transition*, in which a person passes through a middle realm that has few, or none, of the attributes of the past, or of the coming state.
3. *Incorporation*, shown by symbolic acts, indicating re-entry into social visibility.[12]

Van Gennep suggests that one expects the rites of separation to be the most prominent component. However, he

[10] Ibid., p. 258.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, pp. 15-25.

points out that transition and incorporation rites often show greater importance.[13]

Brown's contention is that the African funeral ceremony shares the three-part structure, identified by Van Gennep, as common to all rites of passage:[14]

> The first phase – death – separates the widow from the profane world. The second phase – burial, transition of transformation, recognised by an expression meaning "to stay inside" – continues the widow's seclusion from secular life. The third phase – incorporation, called "to come out" – is a celebration of the removal of the pollution of death, and the restoration of normal social relations.

Not only are there phases within the funeral rite, there is often meaning attached to the symbolic dynamics, which are taking place within the ritual context. Ronald Grimes tells us that "when doing ritual analysis, it is important to focus on six major areas: ritual space, ritual objects, ritual time, ritual sounds and language, ritual identity, and ritual action".[15] In doing his analysis of the African funeral ceremony, Brown has also worked with some of these major areas. He seems to have selected areas that have obvious symbolic meaning. I will attempt to do the same for the Dugum Dani funeral rites.

The Dugum Dani Funeral Rites

The Dugum Dani funeral rites have four stages. These should not be confused with the stages, identified by Gennep, though some comparison can be made. These stages are

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[13] Ibid., p. 146.
[14] Brown, "African Funeral Ceremony", p. 258. Note also that Calvin Conkey, "The Malay Funeral Rite", also uses Van Gennep's structure.
[15] Ronald Grimes, cited by Conkey, "The Malay Funeral Rite", p. 47.

identified more by the progression of ritual time and ritual action. Heider[16] describes these stages:

> The first stage of the funeral follows immediately on the death, and the second stage is held a month or so later. These first two rituals are held for an individual funeral. The third stage is a combined ritual for all the funerals in one or more confederations, and the final stage terminates all the funerals in the entire alliance area, and is held in combination with the great pig feast.

There is no hard and fast time span for all four stages. However, it seems the cycle occurs every three to five years.

(a) The Ritual – The Morning After the Death

The body is placed within the compound that belongs to the deceased, or possibly within the compound of an important man, who can afford to provide a better funeral (this is only possible, when the deceased dies within the proposed compound). The funeral begins at about eight o'clock in the morning. The corpse is displayed, sitting on the floor against the rear wall of the house, legs strapped up, so it sits in a foetal position. If the corpse is male, the body is usually displayed in the men's house. If it is female, the corpse is displayed in the cooking house. "In a 'fresh blood' funeral, for a person just killed by the enemy, the corpse is arranged in a kind of a chair, in the centre of the courtyard."[17] The reason for this is that the ghosts of the deceased need to be placated. Heider suggests that this is accomplished, to begin with, by displaying the corpse more prominently.[18]

The funeral guests arrive, those of the male's father's line bringing with them pigs, and the in-law side, funeral gifts, such as carrying nets and cowry shells. Dirging precedes the

[16] Heider, *The Dugum Dani*, p. 147.
[17] Ibid., p. 148.
[18] Ibid., p. 150.

presentation of gifts, then the nets are draped on the corpse's chair, or beside the corpse. The shells are hung around the head, and over the body, of the corpse. Heider found that each gift was interpreted as the contribution of an individual, or group, toward the placating of the ghost of the dead person, and ghosts in general.[19]

Later in the morning, two to two dozen pigs are killed, depending on the importance of the person. The dead pigs are laid side-by-side on a line from the men's house (in the case of the deceased being male) to the compound entrance. "The pigs are then butchered. Strips of the best meat are hung on racks, and the rest is put into large steam bundles, together with ferns and sweet potatoes. . . The adults of the same *sib* (blood relatives) as the dead person usually refuse to eat anything, but the rest enjoy the feast."[20] When the meal is over, pig grease is smeared over everyone. The shell bands are displayed in the same way as the killed pigs, then the men, who are closely involved in the funeral, decide who will receive the bands. The leader of the funeral rites (a close relative of the deceased, or the leader of the compound) shouts out the names of the recipients, who, in turn, reply, "*waawawa!*" The women begin their dirging again.

The corpse is then smeared with pig grease. A small pig, wrapped in a net, is held, with its snout facing the dead person. This is done, in order to draw out the soul of the dead person. The corpse is then placed on a funeral pyre, to be cremated. Everyone begins to dirge. A bundle of grass is held over the corpse, while another man shouts for the ghost to leave. He strikes the bundle with a club, stakes it with a spear, or shoots it with gun, if it is an important person. The bundle is taken to the compound entrance, where a feather wand is waved over it. This is to signify the removal of the power of the ghost.

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[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid., p. 151.

At around 6 pm, on the day of the cremation, a group of men and boys seek to drive out the ghost from the compound by shouting for the ghost to leave. Rocks and spears are thrown in all directions.

(b) The Night Between the First and Second Days

The people of the compound, and the closest relatives, prepare to spend the night awake. A long bundle of grass is laid on the roof of the common cookhouse. Around 8 pm to 9 pm, all talking stops, and everyone moves inside. The grass bundle is taken outside the compound. Normality is then resumed.

(c) The Second Day

At dawn, one or two fingers of girls, who are close relatives, are chopped off. These are seen as funeral gifts that will impress the ghosts.[21] The bones of the deceased are removed from the fire by closely-related women. The ashes are bundled up, and hung on the wall of the common cookhouse, to await the next day. The women argue over who will receive the nets that were brought as gifts. Early in the afternoon, more guests arrive, but only about one-third in number, compared to the day before. Food is distributed.

(d) The Third Day

An older man of the compound removes the bundle of bony ashes from the cookhouse, placing them in a low slat enclosure, behind the men's house. A new carrying net, with pigtails attached to it, is made. This becomes the main tangible symbol of the dead person. This net will eventually be wrapped in other nets at the *ebe akho* ceremony, and deposited at the chief ceremonial compound of the alliance. Feasting begins again.

[21] Ibid., p. 155.

(e) The Fourth Day

In the evening, water is poured over the cremation ashes, in the bone enclosure behind the men's house. Heider received no special explanation for this.[22]

(f) The Fifth Day

The first phase of the funeral is over. "In the courtyard, sprigs of wild raspberry are laid over the cracked rocks used to heat the steam bundles (of food), to remove, or to neutralise, the supernatural power that has accumulated in the rocks, or the compound, during the last four days of ceremonies."[23] A grass bundle, representing the ghost, is taken to a ghost house in the forest.

(g) The Second Stage of the Funeral Rites – Four to Six Weeks After the First Stage

Heider[24] summarises this stage as follows: first day: in the afternoon, the *ilkho* is announced for the next day. This is the pig-killing ceremony, similar to that of the first stage. Second day: pigs killed, eaten, pig meat distributed. Third day: women remove mourning mud (Heider did not describe when this was put on), boys renew their penis gourds. The arch ceremony takes place. This is a symbolic feeding of the ghost. Pig and sweet potato are eaten. Fourth day: pig and sweet potato eaten, mourning moustaches removed.

In regard to this second stage, Heider conveys the rich significance it has:

> Informants said the purpose of this ritual was to placate the ghost, and also to restore the *edai egen*, or soul matter, of those most-deeply moved by the death. Such explicitness is unusual. Although the funeral activity, as

[22] Ibid., p. 156.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., p. 158.

> a whole, can be seen as a gathering of the members and resources of the community, to support those closest to the dead person in their deep distress. In fact, during much of the time, they are tactfully ignored, left alone, in the midst of the crowd of funeral guests. But, at this one moment, they become of focus of the ritual.[25]

(h) The Third Stage of Funeral Rites

This phase was a combined ceremony, incorporating all funerals since the alliance-wide *ebe akho* ceremony had last taken place. The ritual begins in individual compounds, moves to the ceremonial leader's compound, and then returns to the individual compounds. On the first and second days, nets, shell bands, and stones are collected, to make up one large bundle for each funeral. A funeral dirge can be heard, with some talking. The women keep out of sight. On the third day, the ritual moves to the ceremonial leader's compound, where the bundles, representing each funeral, are spread out in the courtyard. The ceremonial leader inspects the goods displayed, then stopping at each bundle, touches it with a hand, or a foot, shouting out the name of the dead person it represented.[26] The atmosphere returns back to normal. The fourth day marks a return to the home compound, where the bundles are again laid out, and an important man of the village shouts out the names of the dead over the bundles. Feasting begins again.

(i) The Fourth Stage of Funeral Rites

This stage forms one part of the *ebe akho* ceremony, the major pig feast. Not only is the fourth stage the "final, and culminating, phase of all funerals, but it is also the only time when marriages and boys' initiation rites are held".[27] It is notable that the five-year cycle of events is also used to limit access to sexual partners for that same period, where sexual

[25] Ibid., p. 159.
[26] Ibid., pp. 160-161.
[27] Ibid., p. 162.

abstinence is sanctioned.[28] The events that link this stage with previous stages are the killing of pigs and feasting. There is also another arch ceremony, held in connection with previous funerals. This would be to feed and placate the ghosts.

The death of a person begins a series of rituals that extend over a period of several years. The major goals that these rituals seek to achieve appear to be the disposal of the body by cremation, the driving of the ghost of the dead person away from the settlement area, and, subsequently, to keep it placated, so that it will not return. The funeral rituals also function to strengthen kinship ties, providing a social forum, where marriage and boys' initiation rites are performed. The importance of the exchange of goods, which occurs as part of the funeral rituals, emphasises how integrated the economic order is, with the Dani view of life and death.

In seeking to analyse the Dani funeral ritual, using Gennep's three stages, we can note the following:

- Stage one of the funeral, through to day one of stage two, marks the period of *separation*. This stage is highlighted by symbolic acts, depicting detachment. There is the detachment of the deceased from the land of the living. This is marked with the display of the body, the attempt to remove the soul, or ghost, from the body, the cremation of the body, and the placement of the bones and ashes outside of living quarters. Those, whom the deceased leaves behind, are also going through a period of separation. This is marked by the standstill of other normal activities, and the beginning of funeral rites. Symbolic acts include dirging, the placement of mourning mud, and,

[28] The writer could not find any verifiable explanation for abstinence, except to conclude that the sanctions against sex were incidental to the Dani's rather low level of interest in sex. Ibid., p. 168.

later, pig grease, on the body, growth of mourning moustaches, and the refusal to eat on the day after the death.

- The second day of the second stage of the funeral seems to mark the official beginning of the stage of *transition*. However, the third day of the first stage represents a beginning to this, where the women make up a carrying net that represents the deceased. Now that the ghost of the deceased is free, there is a need to placate it, and to drive it out of the land of the living, so that it will join the rest of the ancestral group of living dead. Those, who are alive desire as smooth a transition back into normal life as possible, without interference from an angry ancestor. The *ilkho* pig-killing ritual provides a path to lead the ghost out of the village or compound. The shell bands, which represent economic exchange, are also laid out in a similar fashion. The arch ceremony (a vicarious eating, on behalf of the dead) is symbolic of the presentation of food required for the journey to the ancestors.

- While day three of the second stage marks the beginning of the stage of *incorporation*, it is notable that the placation of the ghost is a major theme of rituals that are repeated within the larger community of the alliance. Incorporation of the living back into normality, within the compound, is marked by the removal of mourning mud, and moustaches. Incorporation back into the wider community of the living is highlighted by the alliance-wide ceremonies, in stages three and four of the ritual. This incorporation is pronounced, in the use of the special gathering of the funeral for marriage and initiation rites. The symbolic use of a carrying net, placed beside many other nets of

> those who have died since the last ceremony, pronounces the deceased's incorporation into the wider community of the ancestors. The nets are filled with food and goods, in order to help the deceased in the community of the living dead.

The Possibilities of Using Primal Funeral Rituals to Convey a Christian Message

Don Brown suggests that death in African societies "is associated with pollution, and pollution is often believed to be removed through the ritual sex act – a prescribed obscenity for a special occasion", which "carries the pollution to the remote, undefined, outside world".[29] In identifying the main issue to be dealt with, in the funeral ritual as pollution, Brown goes on to suggest that the *kilio* points to the biblical portrayal of regeneration:

> Despite the difficulties presented by the role of the *Mwesha*, I believe the *kilio*, and most African rites of passage, are clear-cut pictures of death (separation), burial (transformation, through union), and resurrection (incorporation) . . . although a scapegoat, or the *Mwesha*, must be summoned, again and again, now we have access to a Redeemer, who, at the cross, took away the pollution of sin and death forever.[30]

Brown notes that one of the difficulties, in considering the *kilio* as a potential redemptive analogy, is the danger of syncretism. Christians cannot condone the ritual act of removing the pollution of death, by prescribed extramarital sex. He suggests that missionaries re-examine the death ritual, consult with tribal elders, and suggest functional substitutes.

[29] Brown, "African Funeral Ceremony", pp. 260-261.
[30] Ibid., pp. 262-263.

Then the *kilio* can be cited in preaching as a parallel to the process of salvation.[31]

Having seen the possibilities of conveying a Christian message, through one primal funeral ritual, we need to see if the funeral ritual of the Dugum Dani people has similar entry points and possibilities.

In exploring these possibilities, we need to engage at the level that Hiebert[32] describes as the excluded middle. This is the level of supernatural, this-worldly beings and forces that make up a primal worldview. This is the level of human history, where a power encounter is an entry point into animistic spiritism.[33]

Placation of the ghost of the deceased has been identified as one of the main issues in the funeral ritual of the Dugum Dani. In relation to this, there is a constant paying of a price of the ghost of the deceased, be it through killing pigs, presentation of the fingers of a close female relative, vicarious eating, seen in the arch ritual, or the collection of food and shell bands in carrying nets, representing the deceased. We have also noted that there are the stages of separation, transition, and incorporation. Can we go as far as Brown, to suggest that this is a biblical portrait of regeneration? I'm not sure. There is often much overlap, and repetition of ritual, in the context of the Dugum Dani funeral ritual.

It seems to me that the constant desire to placate the ghost of the deceased could be used as an entry point for the biblical concept of atonement, including propitiation, and redemption. The gospel agrees with the Dani's view that there is a price to pay that frees us from the powers of the unseen

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[31] Ibid., p. 262.
[32] Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1994, pp. 196-201.
[33] Ibid., p. 199.

world of ancestors. In the case of the Dani people, it is payment towards freedom from the harm that the ghost of the deceased can bring, for the whole community. In the case of the Christian message, it is the paying of a price that frees us from the jeopardy of guilt, enslavement to sin, and expectation of wrath (Rom 3:24; Gal 4:4-5; Col 1:14). Christ can be presented as the one who has dealt fully with the powers of the ancestors. There is no longer any need to placate the ghost of a departed relative.

Kwame Bediako's thinking is helpful at this point: "Now, God's saving power focuses on Christ: Christ assumes the roles of all these points of our piety, which we addressed to various sources of power."[34]

Power issues would still dominate, but now their focus is on Christ. Worship and ritual patterns would change, then, from a focus on manipulation and control, to one of intercession, and, finally, praise. The power of God, through Christ, has come to replace all other avenues of power, and has become the central focus of the believers' faith and devotion. Christ, in Kwame Bediako's words, "has come to sit on the seat of the ancestors".[35]

Primal funeral rituals can convey a Christian message. These rituals are a vehicle that can be used in the contextualisation of the Christian message into the worldview of respondents, within a primal culture. David J. Hesselgrave

[34] Kwame Bediako, "Biblical Christologies in the Context of African Traditional Religions", in *Sharing Jesus in the Two-thirds World*, Viney Samuel, and Chris Sugden, eds, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1983, p. 117.
[35] Ibid.

suggests four steps that can lead to the contextualisation of the Christian message.[36]

- First, there is a definition of beliefs, where there is comparing and contrasting of divine truth and culture.
- Secondly, the Christian communicator selects appropriate truth to communicate.
- Thirdly, a process of adaptation is undertaken, where terms are defined, and content is selected that relates to the particular concerns, raised by the worldview being communicated with.
- Lastly, a process of application is undertaken. This is not application of the general message only. It is application of a personal message, in a compelling way, carried out by the communicator, with the realisation that the Holy Spirit's role is essential, and may not always involve the communicator directly, or result in a Christian understanding that the communicator is expecting.

Hesselgrave's steps are useful, as they enable the Christian communicator to encode the Christian message in such a way that it will become meaningful to the respondents.

Primal funeral rituals are useful as entry points for the Christian messages simply because they offer points of contact, where communication begins at a worldview level. It is important that the Christian communicator has a strategy that recognises the existence of the unseen, and does not reject those ideas as being mere superstitions. In accepting the funeral rituals and customs of a primal society as being meaningful and

[36] David J. Hesselgrave, "Worldview and Contextualisation" in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, Ralph D. Winter, and Steven C. Hawthorne, eds, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1992, pp. C49-C52.

significant, one needs to be careful not to overlook the essential sinfulness of humankind. Sin affects not only individuals, but human cultures as well.

As the Christian message enters a culture, it comes as both judge and redeemer. In using a primal funeral ritual as a bridge to communicate the gospel, some aspects of the ritual will remain the same. However, other aspects of the ritual will need to be evaluated by the gospel, according to its own criteria of truth and righteousness.

The role of the Christian communicator is not to do away with, or ignore, traditional rituals and culture. A meaningful community has traditional rites of passage and rituals. Thus, a process of change will be facilitated by the Christian communicator, who helps the new Christian community create new, contextualised Christian practices that are relevant to them, as Christian people. Yes, there is the danger of syncretism, but as the new community reads the scriptures, it will continue to reassess its own customs and beliefs.

As believers, in a world of unseen powers, a community, practising primal funeral rituals, will want to see the reality of a greater power, before changing allegiance to another god. As the gospel is preached, and lived out, in the context of the funeral ritual, those who are afraid of evil spirits will desire the protection of a loving, powerful God. As this protection is observed, and the gospel is communicated, a personal commitment to the gospel is needed. A choice will have to be made to leave behind old beliefs, and take on the Christian life and community. This is a pattern observed in the scriptures. Joshua challenges the people of Israel to visibly demonstrate their allegiance: "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. . . . We, too, will serve the Lord, because He is our God. .

. . Throw away the foreign gods that are among you, and yield your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel" (Josh 24:15-23).[37]

While there may be some continuity with the primal funeral ritual, there will also be symbolic demonstrations, by Christians, in recognition of their commitment to the Lord, and their recognition of the greater power of Christ over that of their former gods and spirits, including their ancestors. It is at this point that Van Gennep's rites of passage have application to the sphere of conversion into the kingdom of God. This time of commitment to Christian faith, is a time of separation into a new kind of living that incorporates, not only the society of the living, but also the society of the living, who have died, both of which, having committed themselves to Christian faith, find themselves in the kingdom of God.

This separation from primal traditions has been made easier, because of the stresses faced from an invasion of Western values, concepts, and commodities, which have eroded previously-accepted traditions. The gospel can bring healing to fragmented communities in such circumstances, when time is taken to both begin with the worldview of the respondents, and to build bridges that give the gospel meaning within the culture. Upon acceptance of the gospel, and separation from primal traditions that do not support the gospel, a period of transition will follow. This is a transition from the fear and capriciousness of the ancestors, in the case of a primal funeral ritual, to the love and grace of God. Finally the goal of a contextualised gospel will be incorporation – incorporation of individuals into the kingdom of God, and incorporation of the gospel into the community.

Difficulties will be faced in this process. The Apostle Paul alludes to this, when he suggests Christians are living in an in-between world, where "our citizenship is in heaven. And we

[37] Note also Acts 19:19: "A number, who had practised sorcery, brought their scrolls together, and burned them publicly."

eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body" (Phil 3:20-21).

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POLYGAMISTS IN THE CHURCH

Noki Pep

Noki Pep is studying for his Bachelor of Theology part-time through the Nazarene College, in the Western Highlands Province. He has pastored in his home area of Mount Hagen, and is currently pastoring at the University of Papua New Guinea, in Port Moresby.

"Will God accept believing polygamists?",[1] asked Charles Kraft, while working in Nigeria, Africa, as a missionary. This is the question that concerns church leaders today, in similar societies, which practise polygamy. Although it is a concern, and although the church, and its leaders, and various societies that practise polygamy, have their views, God's attitude towards sinners, such as harlots, in the New Testament, should give some guiding principles, which the church can use to help polygamists, and their family problems, in the church today.

To begin, let us consider the church leaders' questions on polygamy. The first question for examination is of accepting believing polygamists into membership. Kraft, in his book, *Christianity in Culture*, said that he was daily faced with people, apparently sincere in their faith in Christ, but who would not be allowed to join the church, because they were polygamists.[2] Hillman, in his article, "The Polygamy Debate", deals with the same question of multiple marriages in Sahara, Africa, where multiple marriages are accepted. Hillman works with the Catholic church to find ways the church can help polygamists.[3]

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[1] Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1979, p. 10.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Eugene Hillman, "The Polygamy Debate: A Progress Report", in *Missiology: An International Review* 10-2 (April 1982), pp. 161-165.

Kraft, in his book, *Christianity in Culture*, said that his Western theology did not say anything about polygamy. In fact, Western theology has said a lot about monogamy and adultery. He said that he was struggling, in his mind, with the theological aspect of polygamy.[4]

Hillman said that he attended bishops' meetings, and went to the theologians, even to superiors of the church, concerning the theological aspect of polygamy. The Second Council mandated that polygamy should be tolerated, by sending one wife away. Scholars in the Catholic church prohibited baptising persons in a polygamous union. Michael G. Kriwen, a leading Catholic theologian today, said that there is no theological solution to the practice of polygamy. Finally, Pope Paul II, in one of his addresses, said that God never said that two women and one man became one flesh but the two shall become one flesh. Divorce and polygamy is totally prohibited in holy matrimony in the church.[5]

The second consideration is the church's stand on polygamy. The Catholic's stand is against polygamy. The Protestant stand is also against polygamy. Because of the theological aspects, as presented above, both Catholics and Protestants take a strong stand against polygamy.

The third consideration is the society's view on polygamy. The societies, which practise polygamy, have cultural reasons. Midas, in his book, *Christians and Culture*, reasons, "Why do people act the way they do?", and gives three points:

1. Earlier members in society acted;
2. Situation dictates;

[4] Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, p. 10.
[5] Hillman, "The Polygamy Debate", pp. 161-165.

3. Biological capacities and psychological capacities of one.[6]

African culture accepts polygamy. But polygamy is only one form of marriage, accepted in their culture. Polygamy is practised in many parts of Africa. Both Mbiti and Hillman report on it in their books. Chiefs in Africa have many wives. It is a standard for a deceased person's wife to marry the brother of the deceased. It is all right for one man to marry another woman's parents.[7]

Melanesian cultures accept polygamy. There are a lot of similarities in the two cultures, but with some differences. Therefore, what is true of Africa, in some sense, can be true of Melanesian culture as well. Since the Melanesian cultural emphasis of marriage is on establishing relationships between two or more tribes, polygamy is accepted.[8] Furthermore, polygamy is a cultural practice that is being encouraged by family members, and that has been passed down through the generations.

The societies, which practise polygamy, have justifiable reasons. Africans and Melanesians have their own separate reasons. However, some of the reasons are held in common. Kraft said that it is adultery if one of the polygamist's wives goes off with another man. Polygamy is not considered adultery, but, if the husband goes off with another woman, or the wife goes off with another man, then that is considered adultery.[9]

Ethically, it is not wrong to marry many wives, according to both African and Melanesian cultures. There are other common needs for practising polygamy. These reasons are sexual,

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[6] Eugene A. Nida, *Customs and Culture*, New York NY: Harper & Brothers, 1954, p. 104.
[7] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, London UK: Heinemann, 1969, pp. 114-191.
[8] Mantovani, Ennio, "Traditional Values and Marriage", in *Marriage in Melanesia, Point* 11 (1987), p. 19.
[9] Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, p. 11.

economic, social, sterility, and strength. Sexual reasons were defined as a man's sexual appetite being more than the woman's. Ignorance is one reason that encourages polygamy. Men are not allowed to sleep with wives during their monthly periods, during pregnancies, and during the time of breast-feeding, until the child is weaned. This can last from two to three years. That makes way for the man to marry many wives. If the wife is sterile, the man may marry another woman, to bear children, in order to carry on the family name. Economic reasons are defined as the man marrying many wives so that, through their hard work, he accumulates possessions, and, in turn, his social status is raised.

The fourth consideration is the divine concern about polygamy. God's attitude is seen in the Old Testament. Kraft said:

> God, who was patient with Abraham and David, would be patient, today, with Nigerians, who, though chronologically AD, were BC, in their understanding of God, and His works. Perhaps there is a range of behaviour, within which, God is willing to work, even though it is less than ideal. Perhaps God wants us to seek to understand, and, in love, to accept people, within their cultural context, rather than to simply impose what we have come to understand, from within our cultural context, to be the proper rules.[10]

Harding also suggests that the church could allow a second wife, in exceptional cases, such as Abraham's case, where a man is urged, and forced by his environment, because of sterility.[11] God, who was patient with Abraham, can give the same grace to polygamists today. Mantovani, in his *Traditional and Present-day Melanesian Values and Ethics*, said that God uses culture to reveal Himself, so, if He had revealed Himself to Abraham and David, in

[10] Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, p. 10.
[11] Hillman, "The Polygamy Debate", pp. 161-165.

the Hebrew culture, He surely can reveal His grace, love, and patience, in the polygamist cultures today.[12]

Smedes, in his book, *Mere Morality*, said that God's justice gives more than ordinary justice can give. God's ideal is monogamy, of which Abraham and David fell short, and were open to God's punishment, or justice, but, when they deserved to be punished, God gave His mercy.[13]

Today, Jesus is God's justice to mankind.[14] Jesus' attitude is seen in the New Testament. He was gracious to the woman caught in adultery. According to John 8:4, Moses' law, as stated by the accusers, demanded that she should die. They wanted to get Jesus' approval on passing judgment upon the woman. Jesus, instead, was gracious to her, by not condemning her. He forgave her, and ordered her not to sin, but live a godly life. A truth here is that God gives grace to those, who do not deserve it; but upon receiving God's grace, they must live godly lives, within the boundaries of justice. Polygamists do not deserve God's grace. They deserve God's condemnation, but God can give them His grace, and they can continue to live in His grace, by not taking another wife. Jesus was loving, when He was accused of associating with tax collectors and harlots, in Matt 11:17. When the eyes of the church leaders were upon Jesus, for doing the opposite to them, Jesus showed love to the unloving. He is full of understanding, even of the people's point of view, like the Samaritan woman. He accepted sinners as they were. Not only did Jesus accept sinners as they were, but He forgave them their terrible evils. Jesus' attitude should be the church's attitude, today, even to the polygamists, who do not deserve God's grace.

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[12] Mantovani, Ennio, *Traditional and Present-day Melanesian Values and Ethics*, Occasional Papers of the Melanesian Institute 7, Goroka PNG: Melanesian Institute, 1993, pp. 25, 26, 28.
[13] Lewis B. Smedes, *Mere Morality*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1983, p. 28.
[14] Ibid.

A final consideration is the church's ministry to polygamists, and their families. The church can minister to the polygamist. Lovett, in his book, *The Compassionate Side of Divorce*, said that the principle of love, in Rom 7:6, is the principle, by what the church should operate.[15] Love is what polygamist husbands need. The wives also need love and acceptance by the church. Hillman, in his article, said that the Second Vatican Council mandated that polygamists should send one wife away.[16] This seems to be unfair. Lovett says that, in Rom 7:2, Paul does not talk about divorce, but desecration and bigamy. If the wife wishes to remain married to the polygamist, living with the rest of the other women, it should be fine.[17] David had many wives. When he slept with any one of his wives that was not adultery. But, when he slept with Bathsheba, Uriah's wife, that was adultery. According to Paul, if a wife leaves her polygamist husband, and, if she can remain unmarried, she can still be a Christian.

The church can minister to the children's needs also. They all want their father's love, but the father cannot give adequate love to them all. The church needs to give love to the children of polygamous families.

These considerations of the church leaders' questions, on whether to accept believing polygamists into church membership, are seen as the church leaders questioning themselves, and trying to find ways to help polygamists. However, the church's stand is firmly against polygamy. The polygamist societies' views are for polygamy. But God's attitude, and Jesus' attitude, gives the church some guiding principles to help the church polygamist, and their families, find acceptance in the church, just as much as they find God's acceptance and love.

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[15] C. S. Lovett, *The Compassionate Side of Divorce*, Baldwin Park CA: El Camion Press, 1978, pp. 75, 76.
[16] Hillman, "The Polygamy Debate", pp. 161-165.
[17] Lovett, *The Compassionate Side of Divorce*, p. 75.

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Melanesian Journal of Theology 13-2 (1997)

A LUTHERAN RESPONSE TO THE PREMILLENNIALIST ESCHATOLOGY OF FUNDAMENTALIST CHRISTIAN GROUPS IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Greg Schiller

Greg Schiller is an Australian, lecturing at the Lutheran Highlands Seminary, where he is currently Vice-Principal. He completed a Bachelor of Theology at the Lutheran Seminary in Adelaide, and has commenced studies towards a Master of Theology.

Introduction

My interest in the subject of premillennialism comes from experiences in Papua New Guinea. There, I have noticed a number of Christian groups fervently teaching the doctrine. Equally, I noticed that Papua New Guineans readily recognised the basic themes of premillennialism. It is with this background that the study has been made.

First, premillennialism is described. The major focus is on pretribulational premillennialism as the most popular, perhaps the most promulgated, and the most complex, form of premillennialism. Those Christian groups, who are premillennialists, are then listed.

Secondly, a Lutheran perspective on premillennialism is given. A Lutheran critique on each separate detail of premillennialism is not made, though this would have been a useful study. Instead, hermeneutical principles are discussed, with particular reference made to the millennium.

The next section places premillennialism in the context of Papua New Guinea. I discuss whether traditional beliefs, and

modern conditions, make premillennialism attractive to Papua New Guineans.

Finally, suggestions are made for a response by the Evangelical Lutheran church of Papua New Guinea.

Premillennialism

Stated briefly, premillennialism is the belief, based on Rev 20, that Christ will return to earth to set up an idyllic kingdom, which will last for 1,000 years. This belief is sometimes called "chiliasm", based on the Greek word χίλια (*chilia* = thousand), whereas the word "millennium" is based on the Latin words *mille* for "thousand", and *annus* for "year". The fact that Christ comes before this 1,000-year period, gives rise to the word "premillennialism". Beliefs, differing from premillennialism, are classified as "postmillennialism", and "amillennialism".

Postmillennialists believe that, through Christian teaching and preaching, the influence of the gospel, in this world, will spread, to such an extent, that the whole world will experience an extended period of peace and prosperity. This period they call the millennium. At the close of this period, there is a brief period of tribulation, after which Christ will return. That Christ returns after the millennial period, gives rise to the term postmillennialism.[1]

Amillennialists do not believe in the millennium as a time of universal peace and prosperity just prior of the end of the world. They interpret the 1,000 years of Rev 20 to be a figurative expression, referring to the complete period, from the death and resurrection of Christ, to His second coming. Christ's defeat of Satan at Calvary, and His reign in heaven, is the millennium, present now.[2]

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[1] Loraine Boettner, "Postmillennialism", in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, Robert G. Clouse, ed., Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1972, pp. 117-141.
[2] Anthony Hoekema, "Amillennialism", in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, Robert G. Clouse, ed., Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1972, pp. 147-187.

Premillennialists are distinctive, in believing that there will be a literal reign of Christ on this earth before the end of this age. This, then, affects their perception of end-time events. While postmillennialists and amillennialists believe that the return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the judgment, occur as a combination of events concentrated at the end of time, premillennialists believe these events occur in stages, extending over a long period of time. The return of Christ is not yet the end of the world. His return and the end of the world are separated by at least 1,000 years. For some premillennialists, the very return of Christ is not one event, but it occurs in stages. Likewise, the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment also have distinct phases, and do not occur as one event. Thus, premillennialists develop a neat program of the different events that will take place. They outline when they will take place in relation to other events, and, sometimes, are able to indicate the number of years separating events, by their interpretation of prophetic numbers.

Among premillennialists, there are different opinions regarding the exact programme of end-time events. The major difference involves Christ's return, in relation to the tribulation period. The tribulation, in the context of premillennialism, refers to a short period (usually seven years) of intensive trouble in the period immediately preceding the millennium. Premillennialists are divided in opinion, as to whether Christ will return before, midway through, or after the tribulation.

Post-tribulational premillennialists believe that Christ returns after the tribulation. The tribulation is viewed as a period of intense persecution of the church, during which the Antichrist rises in opposition to the church.[3]

Pre-tribulational premillennialists believe that Christ's return will be in two stages – the first stage occurring before the tribulation. This first stage of Christ's return is known as the

[3] Christianity Today Institute, "Our Future Hope: Eschatology and its Role in the Church", in *Christianity Today* 31 (February 6, 1987), p. 5-I.

"rapture", when Christ takes His church to heaven. At the end of the tribulation period, Christ returns with His church to set up His kingdom on earth for 1,000 years.[4]

Mid-tribulational premillennialists believe in a seven-year period prior to the millennium, the first half of which is a period of persecution, experienced by the church. Then follows the rapture so that the church is spared the later, more intense, troubles, known as the great tribulation.[5]

Pre-tribulational premillennialism is probably the most-dominant eschatological position among premillennialists.[6] Certainly, the more-sensational books about end-time events, which have found popular appeal, have been written from this perspective. It is their programme for end-time events that is outlined here.

1. **Signs of the end.** Despite their preoccupation with signs, pre-tribulational premillennialists believe that most signs of the end happen only after the church has been raptured from the earth.[7] However, they believe that world events, prior to the rapture should reveal developments, which anticipate the signs to occur before the end. Therefore, conditions prevailing during the tribulation period – lawlessness and rebellion, violence, sexual perversion, occultism, earthquakes, unstable economic conditions, plagues, famines, and wars – are expected to assume greater magnitude, as the rapture gets closer.[8]

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[4] Ibid., p. 4-I.
[5] Ibid., p. 5-I.
[6] Ibid., p. 4-I.
[7] R. Ludwigson, *A Survey of Bible Prophecy*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1973, p. 142.
[8] Tim LaHaye, *The Beginning of the End*, Wheaton IL: Tyndale House, 1972, pp. 91-136.

Current events, especially regarding Israel, the Middle East, a United Europe, Russia, and the World Council of Churches, are interpreted as prefiguring events and alliances, from which will arise, in the tribulation period, a world dictator, and world religion.[9] Pre-tribulational premillennialists are at their most creative here, imagining how current events will evolve into fulfilled Bible prophecies.

2. **The Rapture.** The second coming of Christ occurs in two stages. Christ comes in the air, secretly as a thief (1 Thess 2), at the rapture. He comes to the earth, publicly, in His glorious appearing (Rev 1:7). The chief text said to support the rapture is 1 Thess 4:16-17. Though this text seems to describe a very public appearing of Christ, pre-tribulational authors maintain that it is audible only to believers.[10] Living Christians, together with dead Christians, who are raised at this moment, receive their glorified bodies, as described in 1 Cor 15:51-52. They meet Christ in the sky, and are taken with Him to heaven.[11] Promises, in scripture, that believers will be saved from the wrath to come (Rom 5:9; 1 Thess 1:10; Rev 3:10) are cited as proof that the church must be taken to heaven before a time of tribulation is experienced by others left on earth.[12] Following a futurist interpretation of Revelation,[13] the outline of Revelation also supports that the church (Rev 2-3) will not suffer the tribulation (Rev 6-18).[14]

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[9] Ibid., pp. 168-169, 146, 147, 158.
[10] Ibid., p. 27.
[11] Ibid., p. 25.
[12] Ibid., pp. 81-82.
[13] Barry Chant, and Winkie Pratney, *The Return*, Chichester UK: Sovereign World, 1988, pp. 122-123.
[14] LaHaye, *The Beginning of the End*, p. 15.

3. **The Tribulation.** The period between the two stages of Christ's return is called the "tribulation". Rev 6-18 pictures this time of trouble on earth. Prophecies from Dan 9 are used to determine that it will last for a period of seven years.[15] A number of events are expected to occur. The temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem, and temple sacrifices renewed. A political leader will make a seven-year treaty with Israel. Midway through, the contract will be broken, and the political leader will halt sacrifices at the temple, demanding absolute allegiance to himself. Those who do not worship him are severely persecuted (Dan 9:26-27; Rev 12-13). This world leader rules during a period of intense trouble on earth, which is seen as God's wrath on the idolatry of people, who have rejected him. However, 144,000 Jews are converted during this period, and preach the gospel to the ends of the earth.[16]

   During this seven-year period of trouble on earth, Christians have already appeared before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10), and have been fully reunited with Christ in heaven. Their time in heaven is usually called "the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev 19:5-10).[17]

4. **Armageddon and the Return of Christ.** The end of the tribulation period will be characterised by immense destruction of the earth and her people, and by a final world war (Armageddon), concentrated in Israel. Christ returns to the earth in time to save Jerusalem from attack. This is the public return of Christ, with His saints, to set up the millennial

[15] Jerry Vines, *I Shall Return: Jesus*, Wheaton IL: Victor Books, 1977, pp. 69-70.
[16] Ibid., p. 75.
[17] Ibid., p. 100.

kingdom on earth. The immense destruction, at the end of the tribulation, is God's retributive judgment on the Christ-rejecting people of the tribulation period. They are sentenced to eternal punishment, but spend the next 1,000 years in a place called "torments" (Luke 16:19-31). A Jewish remnant, and others, who showed faith in Christ, by the way they treated this Jewish remnant, during the tribulation, are allowed into the millennial kingdom. The judgment, described in Matt 25:31-46 is believed to occur at this time.[18]

5. **The Millennium.** With evil utterly routed at Armageddon, Satan is bound for 1,000 years, and Christ begins His reign on earth. Revelation does not give many details about this kingdom, except its duration. Old Testament prophecies, made to Israel, are fulfilled, literally, during this period, and these provide the details of what the kingdom will be like. There will be peace among men (Is 2:4), and between men and the animal kingdom (Is 11:6; 65:20). Jesus rules a perfect, one-world government (Zech 14:9, 16-21). The ravaged earth will have been restored. Sacrifices at the temple will be restored (Ezek 45:17). Nations will regularly travel to Jerusalem to keep the feast of tabernacles (Zech 14:16).[19]

   Christians have already been raised, at the time of the rapture. The first resurrection (Rev 20:4-5) is believed to refer to those believers, martyred during the tribulation, and possibly Old Testament believers. At the end of the millennium, Satan is released. Some descendants of Israel's enemies, born during the millennium, are deceived by Satan, and organise

[18] Hal Lindsey, *There's a New World Coming: a Prophetic Odyssey*, Santa Ana CA: Vision House, 1973, pp. 217-226, 263-265.
[19] Ibid., pp. 268-270.

for war. But Christ defuses the rebellion, and ushers in God's eternal kingdom.[20]

6. **The Great White-Throne Judgment.** At the end of the millennium, there occurs the resurrection of all the bodies and souls of the unbelieving dead of all ages, to be gathered at the great white throne of God (Rev 20:11-15). This last judgment is a final confrontation between God and unbelieving people, to clearly demonstrate to unbelievers why they are already condemned. They join Satan in the "lake of fire".[21]

7. **Creation of a New Heaven and Earth.** God destroys the old earth, and recreates a new heaven and earth. His crowning creation is the New Jerusalem (Rev 21). The building materials and dimensions are taken quite literally.[22] God will supply all the natural resources for this restored paradise.[23]

Who are the premillennialists? Premillennialism is prevalent among Christians, who favour a more literal interpretation of the Bible. It is, therefore, the predominant view among the more-conservative denominations.[24] Virtually all people, who identify themselves as fundamentalists, are premillennialists.[25] The majority of evangelicals are also.[26]

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[20] Ibid., pp. 277-278.
[21] Ibid., pp. 279.
[22] Ibid., p. 292.
[23] Ibid., pp. 285, 288-289.
[24] Chant and Pratney, *The Return*, pp. 123-125.
[25] Kathleen C. Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So*, London UK: SCM Press, 1989, p. 53.
[26] Chant and Pratney, *The Return*, p. 125.

Premillennialism is widespread among Pentecostals.[27] Seventh-day Adventists have a distinctive premillennialist eschatology.

Fundamentalists accept premillennialism, because of its literal interpretation of prophecies. Those, who do not subscribe to premillennialism, are suspected as being of liberal persuasion. It is thought that, if one can interpret prophetic texts in a non-literal way, then the historic Christian doctrines can also be explained away, through non-literal interpretations.[28]

Fundamentalists have also accepted dispensationalism, taught by J. N. Darby, and popularised by C. I. Schofield.[29] This view divides scripture into seven dispensations, or periods of time.[30] It teaches that, in each successive dispensation, God deals differently with humankind. Under the dispensation of Law, God dealt with Israel, while under the dispensation of Grace, God deals with the church. Israel and the church are two distinct peoples of God, for which He has two distinct purposes. The promises made to Israel, therefore, cannot find fulfilment in the church. They must be literally fulfilled in Israel. This, it is believed, will happen in the next dispensation – the millennium. In dividing scripture this way, dispensationalism has ensured that Old Testament prophecies are interpreted literally.[31]

Evangelicals separated from fundamentalists in the 1940s, as a reaction against the separatist, anti-intellectual tendencies among fundamentalists. They remained, however, strongly committed to biblical inerrancy.[32] Often, they are characterised as

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Robert P. Lightner, *Prophecy in the Ring*, Denver CO: Accent Publications, 1976, p. 52.

[29] T. P. Weber, "Dispensationalism", in *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, Daniel G. Reid, ed., Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1990, p. 358.

[30] Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So*, p. 50.

[31] Hermann Hoyt, "Dispensational Premillennialism", in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1972, pp. 72-73.

[32] B. L. Shelley, "Evangelicalism", in *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, Daniel G. Reid, ed., Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1990, pp. 413-416.

stressing a personal experience of God's grace, usually termed the "new birth". Many evangelicals abandoned dispensational theology, though most have continued to be premillennialists.[33]

In general, Pentecostals share the premillennial and dispensational beliefs of fundamentalists. They are unique, only, in their belief that their own movement is a fulfilling of end-time prophecy.[34] In recent years, there has been less dependency on dispensationalism among Pentecostal scholars. However, many are still premillennialists. The statement of faith of the Assemblies of God, for example, commits their denomination to a premillennialist, though not necessarily dispensational, eschatology.[35]

Seventh-day Adventists have a unique understanding of the millennium. They believe that, when Christ comes again, all the wicked are slain, and Satan inhabits a desolate earth for 1,000 years. This is his chaining – he has no one to tempt. Resurrected believers, and living saints, are taken with Christ to heaven, where they reign with Him for 1,000 years. During this period, all the righteous participate in the "millennial judgment". This "judgment" serves the purpose of satisfying the righteous that God's judgments are just. At the end of the millennium, the wicked are raised, and Satan leads one last rebellion against Christ. Christ descends, with all the saints to the earth, and executes the decisions of the millennial judgment. Satan, his angels, and all the wicked, die an eternal death. Christ establishes

[33] J. A. Carpenter, "New Evangelicalism", in *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, Daniel G. Reid, ed., Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1990, pp. 813-814.
[34] D. J. Wilson, "Pentecostal Perspectives of Eschatology", in *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, Stanley M. Burgess, and Gary B. McGee, eds, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1988, pp. 264, 267.
[35] F. L. Arrington, "Dispensationalism", in *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, Stanley M. Burgess, and Gary B. McGee, eds, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1988, pp. 247-248.

His eternal kingdom on a renewed earth, which all the believers inhabit eternally.[36]

Premillennialism, then, is popular among quite different Christian traditions. Fundamentalists, described above, as a separate group, are distinct from Pentecostalism and Adventism. Yet "fundamentalism" is an approach to interpreting the Bible, I believe, which all premillennialists have in common. This is discussed in the next section, and it is in this more-inclusive sense that the term "fundamentalist" will now be used.

A Lutheran Perspective on Premillennialism

How are we able to know what prophetic passages in the scriptures mean? The answer to this question is important in determining what is the Lutheran position regarding premillennialist eschatology.

There are a number of convictions fundamentalists have about scripture, which Lutherans do not hold.[37] Some are important to the discussion of this topic. Firstly, the fundamentalist tends to believe that everything written in the Bible is of, more or less, equal importance.[38] Secondly, there is a strong tendency to interpret everything in the Bible literally. It is frequently asserted that the Bible is a plain book, and that literal interpretations are the obvious, common sense, ones.[39] Among many other distinct beliefs, fundamentalists hold regarding the Bible, these two, I believe, determine very much the hermeneutical principles operating for a premillennialist interpretation of scripture.

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[36] Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines*, Washington DC: Ministerial Association, 1988, pp. 335-372.
[37] Henry P. Hamann, *The Bible Between Fundamentalism and Philosophy*, Minneapolis MN: Augsburg Publishing, 1980, pp. 9-29.
[38] Ibid., pp. 11, 63.
[39] Ibid., pp. 14-15.

Following these principles, fundamentalists staunchly uphold premillennialism as an unnegotiable tenet of faith. Old Testament prophecies are interpreted (at least in part) literally, without any reference to the New Testament. Isolated passages are interpreted to provide a timetable of end-time events, without allowing other passages of scripture to have any controlling influence. Fundamentalist interpretations have a kind of "proof text" support. Doubting their interpretations, doubting premillennialism, is tantamount to doubting the authority of the scriptures.[40]

Fundamentalists, and premillennialists, at that, do face the dilemma of choosing whose "literal" interpretation is right. In the speculative area of the last times, different fundamentalist exegetes will interpret the same text quite differently from one another.[41] In popular books on the subject, the proliferation of sensational interpretations, often changing according to the current events of the time, bears out this problem. Giving all texts equal value, and interpreting them "literally", ends up with rather subjective interpretations. There are some other controls for fundamentalists, though. These, as much as fundamentalists claim to hold the Bible as their authority, are extra-biblical authorities. The Schofield Bible is one such popular and "accredited" authority, which controls many fundamentalist interpretations.[42] The commentary in the Schofield Bible helps to guide the reader to the "obvious" meaning of the text. The division of scripture into seven periods ("dispensations") is accepted, and determines how texts are interpreted.[43] Other commentaries, and the preachers and teachers in the movement itself, hold leading roles as authoritative interpreters. Usually, one is not to question their interpretations, or that could be construed as a lack of faith in the

[40] Ibid., p. 21.
[41] Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So*, pp. 42-45.
[42] Millard J. Erickson, *Contemporary Options in Eschatology*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1977, p. 114.
[43] Ibid., p. 109.

Bible itself.[44] Ultimately, then, fundamentalists have some controlling factors in interpreting biblical texts literally. These controls demand a premillennialist eschatology. But, as to specific interpretations of end-time events, these controlling factors have not been able to contain the speculative interpretations: all claiming to have biblical support.

The doctrinal statements of the Lutheran church of Australia set out, clearly, its hermeneutical principles for interpreting scripture passages about the last things. As with all doctrines, the person and work of Jesus Christ is at the centre of the doctrine of last things. Scripture passages about the last things cannot be interpreted in a way that is inconsistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ. The doctrinal statements see this as the determining principle of scripture interpretation, including also the interpretation of eschatological passages, and figures, in both the Old and New Testaments.[45]

> Other principles, guiding interpretation, are: to adhere closely to the words of scripture; to emphasise the clear doctrinal passages (*sedes doctrinae*); to interpret scripture with scripture; to read the Old Testament in the clear light of the New Testament; to maintain, carefully, the essential distinction between Law and Gospel.[46]

These principles, properly adhered to, guard against speculative interpretations being peddled as having biblical authority.

Lutheran interpretations are usually unable to provide direct, and absolute, information about the end times, in the way the premillennialists do. The prophetic passages on the last things often use figurative language. This is because they usually speak

[44] Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So*, pp. 72-73, 78, 81-82, 94-95.
[45] *Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions of the Lutheran Church of Australia*, Adelaide SA: Lutheran Publishing, 1985, p. A14.
[46] Ibid.

about things, which are beyond our experience, and about events, which have not yet happened. It is not always possible to interpret precisely what is meant by each prophecy. The principle of "scripture interprets scripture" is often not able to be used either, since many figures in the passages on the end times have no analogy elsewhere in the scriptures.[47] In such cases, it is not right to assert that one particular interpretation is dogmatically correct. A tenet of faith cannot be built on an isolated and/or obscure passage. Clear doctrinal passages should, therefore, control our interpretation of obscure passages.[48] Lutherans, therefore, do not join with premillennialists, in publishing details and timetables about unfolding end-time events. These, they believe, cannot be arrived at with certainty, from scripture, but are supplemented by human speculation.

The Lutheran Confessions reject the teaching that, before the resurrection of the dead, saints and godly men will possess a worldly kingdom, and annihilate all the godless (AC XVIII). The premillennialist expectation of a 1,000-year reign of Christ, and the saints on earth, is rejected as unscriptural.

The Old Testament passages, which prophesy about universal peace and prosperity (Is 2:2-4; 11:6-9; Zech 9:9-10; 14:16; Mic 4:1-4), do not demand, as premillennialists maintain, a future millennium, as fulfilment of the prophecies. Lutherans see these prophecies as fulfilled, beginning with the establishment of God's kingdom rule at Christ's first coming, continuing through the church age, in the preaching of the gospel, and administering of the sacraments, and, finally, consummated, when Christ comes again.[49] The New Testament witnesses to the peace on earth that came at Christ's birth (Luke 2:14), and is for all who believe in the gospel (John 14:27; 16:33; Eph 6:15; Phil 4:7).

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[47] Werner Elert, *Last Things*, Martin Bertram, tran., St Louis MO: Concordia Publishing, 1974, p. 8.
[48] *Doctrinal Statements*, p. A14.
[49] Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics III*, St Louis MO: Concordia Publishing, 1953, pp. 520-521.

Old Testament prophecies even link the promises for peace with promises the New Testament sees fulfilled with the incarnation (Is 11:6-9; cf. Is 11:1-8). In that any prophecies still pertain to the future, Lutherans interpret that their fulfilment will come at the last day, and in the age to come.[50]

The only passage in the Bible, speaking of a 1,000-year reign, is in the Apocalypse (Rev 20:1-6). This calls into question the importance the premillennialists have put on the doctrine. Although Jesus spoke about the end times, He never predicted a 1,000-year earthly reign, nor any events that require such a period to take place. Likewise, the apostle Paul made no mention about such an earthly rule.

Compounding the difficulty, in interpreting the passage, is its obviously figurative language. For example, not even premillennialists demand that a literal chain is used to bind Satan (Rev 20:1-2). Key, chain, abyss, serpent, all are figures, and so, most likely, is the 1,000 years. Clear scripture passages, and the message of the Bible, centring in the gospel of Jesus Christ, must guide the interpretation.

Premillennialists are determined that an earthly kingdom is meant. Some believe that it will be the time, when a Jewish kingdom is literally restored, having been postponed, when the Jews rejected Christ. Lutherans see no support for this theory of postponement, nor of an earthly kingdom. Quite the opposite is spoken of in scripture. The kingdom of God, which will be finally consummated, at the end of time, has already begun (Luke 17:20-21). It was inaugurated in the life of Jesus Christ, His proclamation of the good news, and in His death and resurrection. It is not a kingdom, belonging to this world (John 18:36), offering an earthly, and external, peace.

[50] Ibid., p. 522.

The 1,000-year period of Rev 20 can be understood as the whole Christian era between Christ's first and second comings. Firstly, Satan is bound (Rev 20:1-3), and secondly, the souls of those beheaded for witnessing for Christ, and those who remained faithful to Christ, in not worshipping the beast (Rev 12-13), reign with Christ (Rev 20:4-6). The binding of Satan, in Rev 20:1-3, seems to parallel Rev 12:7-17, which pictures Christ's victory over Satan (12:4-5,10), the persecuted Christians' victory over Satan, because of Christ's death on the cross (Rev 12:11), and God's protection of the church, despite Satan's continuing attack (Rev 12:13-16). Satan is bound, in that Christ has won the victory. Because individual believers, martyrs, and the whole church, participate in this victory, Satan is ultimately unable to take away the blessings of God's kingdom from them, even though he continues to attack them. Luther's hymn, "A Mighty Fortress", expresses this well.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, Jesus' casting out of demons is evidence of His victory over Satan, binding (δήσῃ (*dēsē*) = binding) the strong man (Matt 12:29), and evidence, also, of the presence of God's kingdom (Matt 12:28). Noticeably, the same verb (ἔδησεν (*edēsen*) = bound) is used in Rev 20:2, speaking of Satan being bound for 1,000 years. Jesus also sees, in the disciples' missionary activity, a repression of Satan's power (Luke 10:17-18). The binding of Satan, the thwarting of his power, is understood, then, in the New Testament, as occurring already with Christ's first advent.[51] Essentially, of course, the good news proclaims Christ has won the victory over sin, death, and Satan, in His death and resurrection. Passages, such as John 12:31-32 and Col 2:14-15, unmistakably emphasise Christ's death, as the triumph over Satan. Because of such clear New Testament teaching, then, Lutherans would generally regard the 1,000-year binding of Satan to refer to the church age – the time between Christ's first and second advent, when, although Satan's attacks are felt, Christians already have victory over Satan, because of

[51] Hoekema, "Amillennialism", p. 163.

Christ. This particularly fits the context of Revelation. Persecuted Christians are assured that Christ has won the victory, and as has been said above, no matter what happens to them, Satan is unable to take away their participation in Christ's victory (Rev 12:11).

The reign with Christ for 1,000 years (Rev 20:4-6), does not demand to be interpreted as an earthly reign. Many points of the text indicate that it is not that. John saw thrones. In every other instance in Revelation, except for Satan's, or the beast's, thrones, John saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their faithful witness to Christ. The indication is that John, in a visionary way, saw martyrs – people who had died for their faith, and consequently were no longer living on this earth. A parallel vision is in Rev 6:9.

John's vision assures people, who had seen, or would soon see, friends and relatives persecuted, and executed, for their faith in Christ, certainly that, even though they die, they are alive with Christ. This interpretation holds that the "first resurrection" (Rev 20:4) refers not to the resurrection of the body at the last day, which is mentioned later in Rev 20:11-13. It refers, rather, to the transition from physical death to life with Christ in heaven for the believer.[52] The "first resurrection" is a way of describing that, even though Christians die, they are enjoying life, in fellowship with Christ. "This is the first resurrection", John says (Rev 20:4c). In contrast, the rest of the dead, those who have rejected Christ, John does not see as coming to life (Rev 20:5). They do not share in this living and reigning with Christ. What is more, they will suffer the second death, which is eternal punishment at the last day (Rev 20:14). This second death, however, has no power over those who have shared in the "first resurrection". This interpretation then, sees the 1,000-year reign as speaking about a heavenly, not an earthly, reign. Those Christians, who die, enjoy life with Christ now (cf. Phil 1:23; 2 Cor 5:8), and, at the second advent of Christ, their bodies are resurrected. Sometimes this

[52] Ibid.

interpretation is called "realised millennialism", referring to its belief that the millennium is not a future period on earth, but a ruling with Christ now, in heaven.[53]

Lutherans have not made this interpretation of Rev 20 a doctrine, to be confessed. The interpretation is largely dependent on doctrines, clearly taught elsewhere in the New Testament. On the basis of these clear doctrines, Lutherans reject that Rev 20 teaches that there will be resurrections at different times for believers and unbelievers. They teach that there will be a general resurrection of all the dead, both the godly and ungodly, on the last day.[54] The second advent of Christ also will be a single, visible return – not in the stages of the premillennialists' schedule.[55] Logically interconnected with these, is the belief, clearly stated in the New Testament, that the time of the end is unknown.[56] Premillennialists, in our generation, design timetables for end-time events, which preserve only an imminence for the commencement of the timetable.

Pre-tribulational premillennialists believe the rapture will occur unannounced. But, following the rapture, a dependable programme of end-time events sets the time period for the tribulation, followed by the millennium. The beginning of the millennium, and the last day, can then be calculated fairly accurately.[57] This is clearly contrary to scripture (Mark 13:33; 1 Thess 5:2; Matt 24:36).

Likewise, when the Bible speaks about signs, premillennialists determine, with various degrees of precision, how, exactly, these signs are unfolding in history. The purpose for all this is to pinpoint how soon the end-time events will be. Jesus'

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[53] Ibid., p. 169.
[54] *Doctrinal Statements*, p. A15.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Hans Schwartz, "Eschatology", in *Christian Dogmatics 2*, Carl E. Braaten, and Robert W Jenson, eds, Philadelphia PA: Fortress Press, 1984, pp. 581-582.

eschatological discourse (Matt 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 21) contains images for the end of the world, which refer, in the first case, to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. We are not able to ascribe particular historical events as fulfilment of each sign, and so determine that the end is near. Much that Jesus described already occurred at the destruction of Jerusalem. During the church age, similar types of signs have occurred again. At the end, they will be not so much pre-signs, as Elert says, "but the very tokens of the dramatic end itself".[58] The purpose of the signs has been, and is, even now, in summoning Christians to be ready to live, in anticipation of the second advent of Christ (Mark 13:37; Matt 24:27; 25:1-13).

A very succinct, and final, criticism of the earthly millennial kingdom theory can be made with a statement from Elert: "The cross ever remains the kingdom's emblem in the world".[59] Jesus called those, who would be His disciples, to take up their cross, and follow Him (Mark 10:38f; Rom 6:6; Col 2:19; Gal 5:24; 6:14). Tribulation and distress would be the ongoing experience of God's people, according to the New Testament (John 15:18-20; 2 Tim 3:12; Acts 14:22; Rom 8:35-37). Only pretribulational premillennialists are able to assign the major portion of Rev 6ff. to tribulation events that happen after Christians have been taken to heaven. John, contrary to this, saw himself as sharing in these sufferings (Rev 1:9). During this church age, our faith is in Christ, and His victory won on the cross. Our hope is for the consummation of all His promises at the end. This is the tension, characteristic of Christ's kingdom, between His first and second advent: the "already", and the "not yet", the victory we have in Christ, yet the appearance of defeat that exists while we are in this world.[60] Christ's kingdom, therefore, will remain under the cross, until the end of the world. The Parousia, resurrection, and last

[58] Ibid., pp. 581-582.
[59] Elert, *Last Things*, p. 32.
[60] *Doctrinal Statements*, A15.

judgment, must, therefore, occur as a combination last event at the end of the world.

Papua New Guinean Predisposition to Premillennialist Eschatology?

That cargo cults have been both prevalent and prolific in Melanesia is well-known. Tourist information publications, especially, recount their bizarre activities.[61] However, from the more serious studies of the movements, some indications of why premillennialist eschatology is popular and attractive in Papua New Guinea maybe suggested.

Worsley, in his book, *The Trumpet Shall Sound*, compares cargo cults, occurring across Melanesia, from Fiji to Irian Jaya, over a time spanning the 1870s to the 1950s. He calls cargo cults, "millenarian movements", because he sees the cults as expecting and preparing for a future period of paradise on earth, a soon-radical change in the present order of things.[62]

Worsley argues that millenarian movements are likely to occur among people divided into small, separated social units, who feel themselves to be oppressed by another class or nationality.[63] They tend to occur among people, who lack the scientific and technical knowledge of their oppressors.[64] Worsley shows that Melanesians felt oppressed, in their contact with foreign colonial administrators and merchants, and with Christian missionaries. Some groups lost land,[65] some lost, at least for a time, a large proportion of their male population to labour recruiters.[66] All were confronted by challenges, and attacks on

[61] David Stanley, *South Pacific Handbook*, Chico CA: Moon Publications, 1986, p. 422.
[62] Peter Worsley, *The Trumpet Shall Sound*, London UK: Paladin, 1970, p. 22.
[63] Ibid., pp. 235-236.
[64] Ibid., p. 233.
[65] Ibid., pp. 42-43.
[66] Ibid., pp. 48-50, 67, 89, 107.

their beliefs and values.[67] All felt frustrated and deprived, when the new goods, which accompanied the foreigners, as they took control of the region, were not shared freely with the Melanesians.[68]

While Worsley has been criticised, for emphasising a political agenda for millenarian movements, largely ignoring them as religious movements, his basic conclusion is widely accepted. Cargo cults occur as a response to some crisis, usually man-made, whether that crisis be called deprivation, frustration, economic exploitation, military suppression, or colonial domination.[69]

Do the conditions, of which Worsley wrote, still exist in an independent Papua New Guinea? To a large extent, they do. Even though Papua New Guinea has gained political independence, social organisation, along the lines of small, separated villages, is still basic.

Groups remain isolated from each other by different languages, traditional hostilities between near neighbours, and geographic barriers. Even though foreign colonial powers no longer administrate Papua New Guinea affairs, there is still an oppression, felt by many people, in that aspirations for a better life, have not been met. Firstly, the frustration that the Western lifestyle has not been attained, is compounded by Papua New Guinea's continual exposure to it, through the media, through their experience with expatriate workers and tourists, and through their own overseas travel experiences. Secondly, an educated and successful business elite form a superordinate class with Papua New Guinea, persuading others to aspire towards the same. Thirdly, failed attempts at business, the lack of urban employment for secondary- and tertiary-educated youth, and the fluctuation in world market prices for the agricultural products of village-based

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[67] Ibid., p. 256.
[68] Ibid., pp. 99-100, 107, 131, 251-252.
[69] Palle Christiansen, *The Melanesian Cargo Cult: Millennarianism as a Factor in Cultural Change*, Copenhagen Den: Akademisk Forlag, 1969, p. 122.

cash economies, fosters the feeling that the current system is also oppressive.[70] With such conditions prevailing, Papua New Guinea still remains fertile ground for millenarian movements. The message of premillennialist prophets is highly accessible, therefore, to many in Papua New Guinea.

Other studies of cargo cults in Melanesia have recognised them as religious movements. Strelan's study, *Search for Salvation*, concludes that these movements are authentic expressions of indigenous religious beliefs.[71] They will continue to exist, he says, "unless there is a radical (i.e., at the very roots) change in Melanesian religious orientation".[72] Thus, cargo cult ideology is not imported into the Melanesian religious system, but is an expression of some of the fundamental, indigenous, religious beliefs of Melanesians.[73]

Does premillennialist eschatology harmonise, in any way, with these indigenous Melanesian beliefs and aspirations? Those, which consistently have been expressed through cargo cults, could, I believe, also find expression through Christian premillennialism. Firstly, there is the belief that Melanesians have lost their true identity, and the idyllic life that went with it, by either an ancestor's choice, which divided humanity into two groups, or through hostility, or stupidity, which separated one brother from another.[74] This particularly matches dispensational premillennialism, which divides, and maintains, separate identities for the church and Israel. Israel, they believe, lost the opportunity for God's kingdom to be fully established in Jesus' time, when their rejection of Him led to His crucifixion. Jews still, however, maintain a privileged position in God's plan, and can look forward

[70] Garry W. Trompf, *Melanesian Religion*, Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 254.
[71] John G. Strelan, *Search for Salvation*, Adelaide SA: Lutheran Publishing, 1977, p. 11.
[72] Ibid., p. 12.
[73] Ibid., p. 59.
[74] Ibid., pp. 60-61.

to experiencing God's kingdom with Christians in the millennium. A similar hope for restoration of the world's original good order, through reconciliation of two estranged brothers, or through the return of an ancestor, or ancestors, is expressed in Melanesian myths.[75]

Secondly, there is an expectation of a coming end time, for which cosmic upheaval is predicted.[76] The premillennialist preoccupation with signs, pointing to the nearness of the end time, matches this perfectly.

Thirdly, there is the belief that salvation is to be experienced in a concrete, and material, way, embracing the whole community and creation.[77] The millennium, expected by premillennialists, coincides with this belief of a this-worldly salvation.

Fourthly, the belief that knowledge and performance of correct ritual is necessary for gaining access to this "salvation"[78] could attract Melanesians to defect from the mainline denominations, longer established in Papua New Guinea, to the newer, fundamentalist groups, who they feel may provide the answer. May suggests that the mainline Christian denominations are perceived as teaching knowledge and rituals that have failed to provide access to this "salvation". Fundamentalist Christian groups, fresh on the scene, he says, are unconsciously filling the void.[79]

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[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Trompf, p. 243.
[78] Brian Schwartz, "Cargo Movements", in Ennio Mantovani, ed., *An Introduction to Melanesian Religions, Point* 6 (1984), p. 243.
[79] John D'Arcy May, *Christian Fundamentalism and Melanesian Identity*, Occasional Papers of the Melanesian Institute 3, Goroka PNG: Melanesian Institute, 1986, pp. 1-2.

It can be concluded, then, that indigenous religious beliefs could quite conceivably be providing a powerful motivation for Papua New Guineans to accept premillennialist eschatology.

Some final suggestions about the appeal of premillennialist eschatology in Papua New Guinea can be made from May's study, *Christian Fundamentalism and Melanesian Identity*, because Christian fundamentalists almost always hold to a premillennialist eschatology. It is in the towns, May suggests, where Papua New Guineans, feeling isolated from their traditional religious communities, urgently seek to fill the void left in their lives.[80] Fundamentalists, crusading through the towns, and using aggressive evangelism techniques, have often filled that void. Their quite distinct American image appeals to modernised Melanesians. The fashion, music, and Western customs, that are part of the fundamentalist worship style, supplies, at least, some symbols of success. Urban dwellers, returning to the village, or village dwellers visiting town, often become the evangelists, communicating the fundamentalist message back to the village.

Fundamentalists provide absolute answers – a "no-questions-asked religion".[81] Uncovering exactly what the mystic numbers of Revelation and Daniel mean, and pointing to prophecies being literally fulfilled in current affairs, powerfully authenticates the fundamentalist message. Since the mainline denominations had never revealed such amazing truths, they are exposed as charlatans. Converts from mainline denominations to fundamentalist groups usually testify: "I was not sure before, but now I know".[82] Fundamentalists, therefore, especially with the detailed timetables in their premillennialist eschatology, hold out the promise of disclosing secrets that Melanesians desperately want to know.[83]

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[80] Ibid., pp. 8-9.
[81] Ibid., p. 12.
[82] Ibid., p. 13.
[83] Ibid., p. 12.

Finally, the hysteria that is mounting world wide, as the year 2000 approaches, must also be mentioned as contributing towards a magnetic attraction to premillennialism. A sense of urgency and alarm combine in premillennialist messages with an emphasis on flagging world and/or local conditions, which link in with 2000 as a prominently-published target date, both in Christian, and secular, discussion.[84] An association of 2000 with the end of the world can be expected to be fuelled by premillennialist teaching, at least in popular gossip and rumour. In turn, one can expect more Melanesians to look for, and accept, answers from premillennialist eschatology.

Suggestions for a Response to Premillennialism by the Evangelical Lutheran church of Papua New Guinea

Suggestions for church or pastoral responses to cargo cults have been made by Strelan and Schwartz.85 To a degree, some points are also relevant for a response to fundamentalist premillennialism.

Strelan suggests that the church needs to have a thorough understanding of cargo cults, and of the Melanesian cultural context, to establish genuine theological communication between church and cult.[86] In this way, cargo ideology can be challenged with the gospel. When the church has not had such an understanding, it usually has not challenged cargo ideology. Rather, it has unwittingly abetted it, with preaching and teaching that has resonated with the themes of cargoism, or it has totally ostracised cargo cult adherents.

The appeal of cargoism to premillennialism, means that this understanding of the Melanesian context, in the church's preaching and teaching, remains urgent. Likewise, if the church is

[84] David B. Barrett, "Overall Status of Global Mission and World Evangelisation, AD 1900-2000", in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (January 1990), p. 26.
[85] Strelan, *Search for Salvation*, pp. 243-249.
[86] Ibid., pp. 95-97.

going to respond, in ways, other than merely ostracising people, who join fundamentalist groups, an understanding of the theological and sociological characteristics of fundamentalism is necessary. It will not do to ignore or underestimate fundamentalism.[87]

Other suggestions have the church looking at itself.[88] The church also needs to review its own preaching, teaching, and practice, to determine why its members so readily accept the premillennialism of fundamentalist groups.

Premillennialism is presented as absolute truth, with Bible proof texts for support. Generally, Lutherans vaguely know something about eschatology, but usually avoid preaching and teaching about it. Fundamentalists capitalise on this, accusing the mainline churches of hiding the truth from the people. They present themselves as revealing the hidden truths, especially of Revelation and Daniel.

More recently, seminarists in Papua New Guinea have studied Revelation and eschatology. However, most of the pastors, evangelists, and, more importantly, the elders, who do a fair share of preaching and teaching, have never studied these subjects. They do not know what the church teaches about eschatology and Revelation. They do not understand the Lutheran hermeneutical principles of interpretation, and so are prone to losing debates, when premillennialists quote their proof texts.

Popular teaching materials, which aim to reach those actively engaged in teaching and preaching in the church, are urgently required. A recent popular study booklet of Revelation is useful.[89] The church's publisher, Kristen Pres, should publish further study booklets, which teach the Lutheran understanding of current popular eschatological themes. Even tracts should be

[87] May, *Christian Fundamentalism*, pp. 18-19.
[88] Strelan, *Search for Salvation*, pp. 103-104.
[89] Richard Haar, *Stadi Buk Bilong Revelesen*, Madang PNG: Kristen Pres, 1987.

considered. These should be written in *Tok Pisin*, though simple English translations should be made, for urban- and secondary/tertiary-educated Christians. Unfortunately, such materials reach only those, who have access to the church's bookshops.

To reach an even wider audience, articles on popular eschatological themes should be published in the Evangelical Lutheran church of Papua New Guinea's *Niugini Luteran*. The *Sios Kalena*, the annual diary with lectionary, is a popular publication of the church, especially among those involved in a preaching and teaching ministry. It would be useful if short, simple, biblical studies would become a regular feature of this publication. Studies on popular eschatological themes would gain widespread distribution through such a publication, and would reach the preachers and teachers of the church.

Other programmes within the church should include sections on eschatology. *Miti Bible Correspondence* could offer a course on eschatology. The *Was Long Sipsip* programme should consider studies on eschatology, in the Bible study materials they produce for women and youth. Those producing religious instruction materials, especially for secondary students, need to include such studies also.

The Lutheran church needs to take these steps to equip its members with an understanding of Lutheran eschatology. Church members should know that Lutherans have definite beliefs about eschatology, and that these beliefs are thoroughly biblical.

The church will, of course, in presenting Lutheran eschatology, not merely emphasise the other-worldly spiritual dimension. It has been the practice of most premillennialists, I believe, to focus people's faith on what will happen at the end. Meanings of the numbers and figures in Revelation, and the proposed timetable for end-time events, become the central tenet of faith. Their trust is focused on these beliefs. Lutherans need to

counter this distortion, by solidly grounding their eschatology in the certainty of the good news of Christ. They also need to proclaim, and congregations should be signs of, the kingdom's presence already now.[90] Sadly, certainty in Christ's kingdom present now, through the proclamation of the gospel, and administration of the sacraments, is often lacking. Worship is performed as a duty, and Christian faith is divorced from everyday life. This calls for a renewal of congregational life, which, as has been pointed out by Strelan, can come only from a deeper understanding of the gospel, which, Lutherans believe, comes only when Law and Gospel are properly distinguished.[91]

Finally, it has long been noted that the Evangelical Lutheran church of Papua New Guinea has restricted itself more to traditional village communities, making little progress in meeting the challenge of urban ministry.[92] Usually, foreign fundamentalist groups, with their premillennialist eschatology, have targeted these areas. It is true that Melanesians, ultimately, find it difficult to forsake loyalty to their kinship group, even when living in urban areas.[93] The Evangelical Lutheran church of Papua New Guinea has long used this cultural norm, also, for its work in urban areas. However, there is evidence that whole generations are being raised within urban areas, forming a different social unit than one based on kinship identity.[94] Urban ministry by the Evangelical Lutheran church of Papua New Guinea should take seriously these whole, new people groups, based on sociological, rather than cultural, factors. Lutherans urgently need to face the challenges of ministry with such groups, because fundamentalist groups have long been filling the void.

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[90] Schwartz, "Cargo Movements", pp. 247, 249.
[91] Strelan, *Search for Salvation*, pp. 102-103.
[92] Bishop Zurewe, in John D'Arcy May, "Autonomous Church in Independent Papua New Guinea", in *The Lutheran Church in Papua New Guinea: The First Hundred Years 1886-1986*, Herwig Wagner, and Hermann Reiner, eds, Adelaide SA: Lutheran Publishing, 1986, p. 317.
[93] May, *Christian Fundamentalism*, p. 7.
[94] Leonora Mosende Douglas, ed., *World Christianity: Oceania*, Monrovia CA: MARC, 1986, p. 113.

Conclusion

Premillennialism, and, more specifically, pretribulational premillennialism, is dependent on a fundamentalist interpretation of scripture. It is a doctrine, vigorously promoted by some groups, as having absolute biblical authority.

Guided by their interpretation principles, especially:

- the centrality of Christ, and
- that clear passages guide the interpretations of obscure ones,

Lutherans reject premillennialism. Although specific premillennialist beliefs, other than the millennium, are not investigated in full, from a Lutheran perspective, I have shown that the whole premillennialist system of belief is generally undermined by Lutheran interpretation principles.

I have found that there are two reasons why Papua New Guineans could find premillennialism attractive. Many themes of premillennialism resonate with traditional Melanesian religious beliefs. Modern Papua New Guineans are attracted to the Western cultural form of religious groups promulgating the doctrine.

Finally, I suggest that the Evangelical Lutheran church of Papua New Guinea should recognise, and understand, traditional Melanesian and fundamentalist Christian eschatological beliefs. They should challenge these with a gospel-centred eschatology, which needs to be popularly expressed and available.

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Melanesian Journal of Theology 13-2 (1997)

LESSONS ON SUFFERING FROM 2 CORINTHIANS

James O'Brien

James O'Brien is an Australian, lecturing at the Christian Leaders' Training College. He completed a Bachelor of Ministries at the Bible College of Victoria. The following article was written as part of a Master's programme.

Introduction

During his life as an apostle, Paul was no stranger to suffering, and this is reflected in his writings. He speaks of affliction and suffering over 60 times,[1] and, at times, gives detailed lists of these sufferings. Paul suffered often, and from various afflictions and trials. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, Paul's writings reveal a positive attitude to suffering, and this will be examined more fully later in the essay.

Like Paul, the people of Melanesia[2] experience a great deal of suffering. This results from poverty, malnutrition and poor health care, variations in climate, tribal conflict, sorcery, lawlessness, and a number of other factors. Unlike Paul, the response to this suffering is generally far from positive. To a Melanesian, suffering is usually seen as punishment for some wrongdoing,[3] and, often, this is seen in terms of a breakdown in relations between persons, or the breaking of a taboo.[4] This

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[1] S. J. Hafemann, "Suffering", in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, and D. G. Reid, eds, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1993, p. 919.

[2] For the purpose of this essay, the "people of Melanesia" refers, primarily, to the people of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

[3] G. Teske, "Worship the Father in Spirit and Truth", in Wendy Flannery, ed., *Religious Movements in Melanesia Today (2), Point* 3 (1983), pp. 241-242.

[4] Ibid.

punishment can be imposed by an evil spirit, or by another human, through the use of sorcery. Consequently, suffering is not only to be avoided, but indicates that something is wrong in the life of the person who suffers. If the person is a Christian, then this "wrong" is characteristically regarded as sin.

It is not difficult, then, to see the problem for Melanesian Christians. Suffering is common, and difficult to avoid. However, to a worldview, where the general concept of God pictures Him as, principally, retributive,[5] this suffering will, inevitably, be interpreted as punishment for sin. This leads to feelings of guilt, and further anxiety in the sufferer.

Perhaps, more significantly, it also creates ill-feelings in the community. Life is viewed as consisting of a complex relatedness of persons, objects, and spirits, and so the wrong, which one person has done can have implications for the whole group.[6] Therefore, if the group seems to be suffering some misfortune, for example, poor crop yields, then it is perceived as being due to the sin of one, or more, members of the group. The writer has observed that this results in something similar to a "witch-hunt" to find the person responsible, and this occurs, at times, even among those who profess to have accepted the gospel.

It is hoped, therefore, that, by examining what Paul has to say about suffering, some lessons can be learnt, which can be applied to the Melanesian situation, and provide some helpful correctives.

Paul and Suffering

In Acts 9:15-16, Paul's call is linked to suffering, and in 2 Corinthians, Paul refers to his sufferings, to defend the legitimacy

[5] Gernot Fugmann, "Fundamental Issues for a Theology in Melanesia", in Brian Schwarze, ed., *An Introduction to Ministry in Melanesia, Point* 7 (1984), p. 92.
[6] Ibid., p. 84.

of his apostleship.[7] In fact, Paul's most sustained handling of the subject of suffering occurs in 2 Corinthians.[8] Before we turn to examine these writings, however, it is necessary to discuss, briefly, the cultural, intellectual, and experiential influences that may have shaped the way Paul regarded suffering.

(a) Background to Paul's Understanding of Suffering

In the Old Testament, it is possible to determine three main attitudes to suffering. First, it is sometimes seen as retributive. This is not surprising, given the story of the fall in Gen 3, where Adam and Eve are punished for their disobedience. It also results from the strong sense of divine justice, evident in the OT.[9] Secondly, suffering is portrayed as educative and exemplary. Prov 3:11 reveals the expectation that God, as a loving Father, would discipline His children. This attitude is also illustrated in the lives of OT characters, such as Job and Abraham. Thirdly, there is some suggestion that suffering was occasionally understood as vicarious and redemptive. This is evident in some of the prophets, who suffer on behalf of the people, but, perhaps most notably, is seen in the Suffering Servant of Is 52:13-53:12.[10]

It is suggested by Schoeps that suffering was highly valued in Judaism of every period.[11] Commenting on Tannaitic literature, Sanders notes that:

> The suffering of God's people is repeatedly emphasised, and suffering comes to play a significant role in Rabbinic theology. Sufferings are to be accepted with joy . . .

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[7] Paul W. Barnett, "Apostle", in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, and D. G. Reid, eds, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1993, pp. 49-50.

[8] Hafemann, "Suffering", p. 919.

[9] E.g., Ps 62:12; Prov 24:12.

[10] R. B. Edwards, "Suffering", in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, G. W. Bromiley, ed., Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1988, pp. 650ff.

[11] H. J. Schoeps, *Paul: the Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History*, H. Knight, tran., London UK: Lutterworth Press, 1961, p. 128.

because they are part of God's overall redemptive purpose toward Israel.[12]

Part of the reason for this positive approach to suffering was a reflection on the events of the Maccabean period. Suffering came to be seen as part of the destiny of the people of God.[13] However, suffering was seen not only in this positive light. The most-widely held view among the Jewish people was that suffering was a consequence of sin.[14] At times, Paul, himself, shared this view.[15] The cause of this is most likely the seriousness, with which sin was regarded, as it impacted on the moral standing of both nation and individual before the covenant God.[16]

Paul's practice of listing his afflictions[17] has parallels in both Hellenistic and Jewish apocalyptic literature.[18] In these writings, suffering becomes a test of character, and is part of the divine plan.[19]

For this reason, some have suggested that Paul was influenced by these traditions. However, there are also some significant differences. Unlike the Stoic, who endured suffering under his own inner strength, Paul relied on God's strength, to be

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[12] E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, London UK: SCM Press, 1989, p. 105.
[13] A. E. Harvey, *Renewal Through Suffering*, Edinburgh UK: T. & T. Clark, 1996, p. 127.
[14] Ibid., p. 125.
[15] Rom 2:18-32; 1 Cor 11:30; 1 Thess 2:15-16.
[16] Harvey, *Renewal Through Suffering*, p. 126.
[17] These lists are often referred to by scholars as *peristasenkataloge*. They can be found in Rom 8:35; 1 Cor 4:9-13; 2 Cor 4:8-9; 6:4-5; 11:23-29; 12:10.
[18] Ch. Ukachuku Manus, "Apostolic Suffering (2 Cor 6:4-10): The Sign of Christian Existence and Identity", in *The Asia Journal of Theology* 1-1 (1987), pp. 46-49. See also, Colin G. Kruse, "Afflictions, Trials, Hardships", in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, and D. G. Reid, eds, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1993, p. 19.
[19] Ibid.

able to persevere.[20] Paul readily admitted the discomfort caused by the hardships he endured, and did not attempt to feign a serenity in the inner person?[21] Paul also saw a greater purpose in the sufferings than simply being an inevitable part of the messianic woes that Jewish apocalyptics believed signalled the end times?[22] Therefore, while Paul may have been aware of this literary tradition, the differences suggest that he adapted it to suit his own purposes. This adaptation was influenced, to some extent, by the OT tradition, but, most significantly, by Paul's appreciation of the suffering and death of Christ.[23]

(b) Suffering in 2 Corinthians

As stated earlier, Paul's most detailed teachings on suffering are found in 2 Cor. Mak has identified eight passages, which speak directly of suffering. These are 1:3-11; 2:1-7; 4:7-12; 4:16-5:4; 6:4-10; 7:7-11; 11:23b-29; 12:7-10.[24] To this we could add 8:1-2, where Paul speaks, not of his own suffering, but of that of the Macedonian churches.

It is not possible, here, to present a detailed exegesis of each of these passages. Instead, a short summary of each passage will be given, in an attempt to show the contribution they make to Paul's complex attitude to suffering.

2 Cor 1:3-11. These verses constitute a thanksgiving, which, in many Greek letters, and usually in Paul's writings, followed the introductory address, as it does here.[25] This thanksgiving, however, is different, because it does not give

[20] Manus, "Apostolic Suffering", p. 48.
[21] Kruse, "Afflictions, Trials, Hardships", p. 19.
[22] Manus, "Apostolic Suffering", p. 49.
[23] Kruse, "Afflictions, Trials, Hardships", p. 19; Manus, "Apostolic Suffering", p. 49.
[24] A. K. Mak, "Toward a Holistic View of Pauline Suffering: A Contextual Study on 2 Corinthians", DTheol thesis, Australian College of Theology, 1996, p. i.
[25] C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, London UK: A. & C. Black, 1973, p. 57.

thanks for the spread of the gospel, as in Romans, or for the recipients of the gospel as in 1 Corinthians and Philippians, but, instead, focuses on the comfort experienced by Paul and his companions during times of trouble and suffering.[26] Paul identifies these sufferings with the *sufferings of Christ* (v. 5). This term has been variously interpreted.[27] It could refer to the same type of sufferings that Christ experienced, or to the more general messianic sufferings that were expected to accompany the messianic age. It is possible that Paul had in mind both ideas.[28] Either way, for Paul, these sufferings were a result of his preaching the gospel of Christ, and, thus, an integral part of his ministry.[29]

Another significant aspect of these verses, is the connection of suffering and comfort.[30] Barrett suggests this is also related to the identification of the sufferings with Christ's sufferings. The sufferings of Christ are redemptive, and so, through Christ, Paul's sufferings overflow into the lives of the Corinthians to bring comfort?[31]

2 Cor 2:1-7 and 7:7-11. Both these texts refer to the occasions of the interim, or painful, visit, and the "tearful" or "severe" letter. These passages are not normally given any attention in studies on Pauline suffering. However, it is Mak's contention that, by limiting the discussion only to Paul's external sufferings and persecutions, only a partial picture is obtained. It is also necessary to look at the inner anguish Paul experienced for the welfare of the church.[32] As is suggested by words such as "painful", "severe", "tearful", Paul, indeed, suffered great anxiety and sorrow as a result of these incidents.

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[26] Colin G. Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, Leicester UK: IVP, 1987, p. 59.
[27] Ibid., pp. 61-62, for a helpful listing of the alternatives. See also V. P. Furnish, *II Corinthians*, Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1984, pp. 118-120.
[28] Barrett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 60.
[29] Mak, "Toward a Holistic View of Pauline Suffering", pp. 52-63.
[30] Furnish, *II Corinthians*, pp. 120-121.
[31] Barrett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 62.
[32] Mak, "Toward a Holistic View of Pauline Suffering", p. 71.

There was also pain and sorrow on the part of the Corinthian congregation, and the offender.[33] This sorrow, however, can be viewed positively, because it was a godly sorrow that led to repentance.

2 Cor 4:7-12. In these verses, we find the first hardship catalogue (vv. 8 and 9), which serves to illustrate the relationship between human weakness and divine power, expressed in v. 7.[34] Paul's hardships have served as a vehicle for the manifestation of God's power (v. 7), and resulted in life for the Corinthians (v. 12).

In vv. 10 and 11, Paul again identifies his sufferings with those of Christ, and he does so through an interesting expression: "*we always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body*" (v. 10). Christ's death on the cross becomes the model for Paul, in his sufferings, and at the same time, the cause of his sufferings. To share in the life of Christ means also to share in His rejection, suffering, and death, and, like Christ, to do so willingly, and for the glory of God.[35] Kruse expresses this well:

> Thus, the one, who proclaims the risen Lord, finds that, what is proclaimed in his message is also exemplified in his life. On the one hand, he is daily subject to forces, which lead to death, but, on the other, he is continually upheld, caused to triumph, and made to be more than a conqueror by the experience of the risen life of Jesus in his mortal body.[36]

2 Cor 4:16-5:4. In referring to the wearing away of the outer man, v. 16 points back to the effects of the sufferings on

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[33] Ibid., p. 86.
[34] Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, pp. 106-107.
[35] Alister E. McGrath, "Theology of the Cross", in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, and D. G. Reid, eds, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1993, p. 196.
[36] Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, pp. 107-108.

Paul's physical body (4:7-12). These afflictions are then given their correct orientation in vv. 17 and 18, by pointing forward to 5:1-10, to the glory, which awaits Paul in eternity.[37] By looking to the future, Paul is not only able to endure the present trials, but also gives those afflictions a positive perspective,

> with the eyes of faith, he is enabled to see beyond the visible and tangible . . . to the eternal realities of that world, where God's glory shines in the person of Christ (4:6).[38]

Thus, the benefits of suffering are not limited to the future. There is also a value in the present, as a means of drawing the believer closer to Christ.[39] Despite this eschatological orientation, and other benefits that the sufferings produce, Paul honestly admits, in 5:1-4, that his afflictions cause him distress. There is no pretence of escape from pain; Paul groans to be released from his burden.

2 Cor 6:4-10. These verses form the second hardship catalogue in 2 Cor, and the first of the two catalogues in this letter, which Paul uses as a self-commendation.[40] The fact that Paul commends himself with a list of hardships is significant. Almost certainly, one of the key issues, in the dispute between Paul and the Corinthian community is the interpretation of Paul's sufferings.[41] Paul's ability to endure these trials not only provides a character reference, but is certain proof that God's power is present in his life and ministry.[42] Only by the enabling of God,

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[37] Mak, "Toward a Holistic View of Pauline Suffering", pp. 121-123.
[38] Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Waco TX: Word Books, 1986, p. 95.
[39] Harvey, *Renewal Through Suffering*, p. 128.
[40] Mak, "Toward a Holistic View of Pauline Suffering", p. 172.
[41] Paul Brooks Duff, "Apostolic Suffering and the Language of Processions in 2 Corinthians 4:7-10", in *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 21-4 (1991), p. 159.
[42] J. T. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel: An Examination of the Catalogues of Hardships in the Corinthian Correspondence*, Atlanta GA: Scholars Press, 1988, p. 201. Quoted in review by Gordon D. Fee, *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 52 (1990), p. 747. See also S. J. Hafemann, "Self-

could Paul survive these various trials. More than just surviving, however, Paul emerges rejoicing (v. 10). This unexpected joy allows Paul to connect suffering and virtues (vv. 6 and 7) as positive dispositions in his life.[43]

2 Cor 8:1-2. Here, Paul offers the example of the Macedonian churches, whose "*rich generosity*" arose out of "*the most severe trial*". The churches in Macedonia were born in the midst of opposition and persecution, and this persecution continued to plague them at the time Paul was writing this letter. Their sufferings were further compounded by great poverty.[44]

While Paul's intention is to encourage the Corinthians to give generously, the example given demonstrates two aspects of Paul's understanding on suffering:

1. It is not only possible for Paul to rejoice in sufferings, but all believers.
2. Believers demonstrate the cross of Christ in their lives, when, despite affliction or persecution, they express love for others.[45]

2 Cor 11:23b-29. This is the third hardship catalogue, and the second time Paul uses such a list to commend his ministry. As well as the physical strain on his body, of beatings, deprivations, and dangers (vv. 23-27), Paul endured the mental anguish, caused by his concern for the churches (vv. 28-29).[46] The spiritual

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commendation and Apostolic Legitimacy in 2 Corinthians: A Pauline Dialectic?", in *New Testament Studies* 36 (1990), p. 85.

[43] Manus, "Apostolic Suffering", pp. 49-50.

[44] Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, p. 150.

[45] Hafemann, "Suffering", p. 920.

[46] Martin, *2 Corinthians*, p. 387.

anxiety that results from Paul's empathy, expressed in v. 29, indicates Paul's sincerity as an apostle.[47]

In these verses, Paul draws no distinction between his work, and suffering for the gospel. In fact, he practically describes his toil for the gospel, in terms of his sufferings. Paul's sufferings prove his labour for the gospel, and thus, he is able to commend himself as a true servant of Christ.[48]

There is a danger that this list could be interpreted as triumphalist. The account of his humiliating escape from Damascus, in the verses which immediately follow (vv. 30-33), help correct this,[49] as does the next passage on suffering, to which we will now turn.

2 Cor 12:7-10. This passage mentions Paul's famous "thorn in the flesh", and repeats a theme expressed earlier in 2 Cor 4:7, that God's power is present in Paul's weakness.[50]

It is not clear what Paul meant by his "*thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan*" (v. 7). Speculation, as to its meaning, has occurred throughout church history.[51] It is likely that we will never know Paul's exact intent with certainty. Nevertheless, and, in fact, regardless of what the "thorn" is, two elements of thinking are evident. First, the thorn was given by God. This is not stated explicitly, but is inferred by the use of the passive, ἐδόθη (*edothe*

[47] M. L. Barre, "Qumran and the 'Weakness' of Paul", in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 42 (1980), p. 217.
[48] Mak, "Toward a Holistic View of Pauline Suffering", p. 241.
[49] Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, p. 198.
[50] Barre, "Qumran and the 'Weakness' of Paul", p. 221.
[51] Martin, *2 Corinthians*, p. 412. For concise reviews of the various interpretations, see L. Woods, "Opposition to a Man and His Message: Paul's Thorn in the Flesh", in *Australian Biblical Review* 39 (1991), pp. 44-53; T. Y. Mullins, "Paul's Thorn in the Flesh", in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 76 (1957), pp. 299-303; Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, p. 206, notes that the suggestions fall into three main categories: (1) spiritual harassment; (2) persecution at the hands of Jewish, or other, opponents of Paul; (3) some kind of physical or mental illness or injury.

= there was given).[52] This suggests that Paul understood that God may allow suffering, when it achieves His purpose. This is the second element. The thorn was given for a purpose, primarily, to prevent Paul from becoming conceited by the privilege of having observed the "*surpassingly great revelations*". Furthermore, another purpose is achieved. In declining Paul's plea to remove the thorn (v. 8), God teaches him the relation between divine power and human weakness. Rather than triumph in his ability to survive the many and various afflictions, which he experiences, Paul is able to rejoice in these afflictions, themselves. Paul recognises that, in these weaknesses, "*Christ's power*" is at work in him (vv. 9-10). The thorn, whatever it is, and God's enabling of Paul to endure it, serve to authenticate his ministry. Paul is God's servant, at work in the proclamation of God's gospel, by God's grace and strength.[53]

c. A Summary of Paul's Teaching on Suffering in 2 Corinthians

By combining the principles taught, and attitudes reflected by Paul in the above passages, the following can be said about suffering in 2 Corinthians:

1. All believers, and not just apostles, can expect to experience suffering.[54] This is deduced, firstly, by Paul's use of the first person plural, suggesting there is no distinction drawn between apostolic and non-apostolic suffering.[55] Further support for this comes

[52] Martin, *2 Corinthians*, p. 412. See also, Barre, "Qumran and the 'Weakness' of Paul", p. 223.
[53] J. W. McCant, "Paul's Thorn of Rejected Apostleship", in *New Testament Studies* 34-4 (1988), p. 572.
[54] Kruse, "Afflictions, Trials, Hardships", p. 19.
[55] This assumes that Paul uses "we" as inclusive of other Christians. Some scholars disagree with this assumption, suggesting that "we" here is a literary plural, and thus refers only to Paul. See S. J. Hafemann, *Suffering and Ministry in the Spirit*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1990, p. 12ff; P. R. Jones, "Review of 'Suffering and the Spirit: An Exegetical Study of II Cor 2:14-3:3 within the context of the Corinthian Correspondence', by S. J. Hafemann", in *The*

from 1:5-7, 2:1-7, and 7:7-11, where Paul expects not only himself and his coworkers to suffer, but the Corinthians as well. Thirdly, by identifying the suffering of believers with those of Christ (1:6; 4:10, 11), Paul teaches that all believers can expect to share in the same fate as Christ, in being rejected and persecuted.[56] Furthermore, Paul depicts himself as a model servant of God, because of the afflictions he has endured (6:4-5; 11:23b-29). Therefore, anyone who claims to be a servant of God, must be prepared to experience suffering as well.[57]

2. Human weakness becomes a platform for the display of God's power.[58] This was displayed most vividly in the work of Jesus Christ, in His human existence.[59] The divine power, which was evident in Christ's life, and which raised Him from the dead, is the same power, which strengthens Paul, and enables him to endure his sufferings. Consequently, Paul's afflictions, and the power, which is at work in him in these weaknesses, allows Paul's life to be a reflection of the death and resurrection of Christ (4:10-11), and thus confirm his gospel message.[60] Mak argues, from 12:7-10, that there are two conditions to this divine

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Evangelical Quarterly 59-4 (1987), p. 371. Note that Mak, "Toward a Holistic View of Pauline Suffering", pp. 264, 279-317, provides a detailed study on the use of literary plural, and concludes there is a lack of evidence to support the claim of Hafemann and others.

[56] Ibid., p. 266. Hafemann, "Suffering", p. 920. See also Phil 1:29; 1 Thess 3:3-4.

[57] Mak, "Toward a Holistic View of Pauline Suffering", p. 265.

[58] Duff, "Apostolic Suffering", p. 164.

[59] D. A. Black, "Weakness", in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, and D. G. Reid, eds, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1993, p. 966.

[60] Mak, "Toward a Holistic View of Pauline Suffering", p. 268.

power. It is only given to those who are humble, and who suffer for the sake of Christ.[61]

3. Suffering teaches reliance upon God. Through experiences that led him to despair of life itself, Paul learned that his own strength was insufficient, and, instead, he must rely on God (1:8, 9).[62] This also led to a confidence that, because God had delivered him in the past, He would continue to do so in the future. This is not to indicate that Paul always believed he would be rescued by God. From the account of his "*thorn in the flesh*", Paul was aware that, at times, God would allow the suffering to continue, so that His purposes could be achieved. However, even in the event of death, Paul looked forward to the deliverance that would be his through the resurrection.[63] This demonstrates, in part, the connection between suffering and hope.

4. Suffering and hope are interrelated.[64] Paul's future hope in the resurrection not only strengthened him in his struggle against suffering, but also demonstrated the correct perspective, from which to view suffering; i.e., looking to the future. Sufferings are not to be thought of as permanent. Our present condition is not the final one for Christians.[65] Compared with the future, eternal glory that awaits believers, our current trials and afflictions can be seen as "*light and momentary troubles*" (4:17).

5. Suffering and comfort are interrelated. One of God's purposes in allowing His children to suffer is that

[61] Ibid., p. 270.
[62] Kruse, "Afflictions, Trials, Hardships", p. 20.
[63] Mak, "Toward a Holistic View of Pauline Suffering", p. 272.
[64] Ibid., pp. ii, 274-275.
[65] Manus, "Apostolic Suffering", p. 50.

they are then able to comfort others, who experience suffering (1:3-7).[66]

6. Suffering develops Christian character. It teaches humility, and serves as an anti-triumphalist factor in our present life (12:7).[67] It can lead to repentance, through godly sorrow that, in turn, produces earnestness and eagerness in Christian service (7:8-11). It encourages reflection on the selfless love, demonstrated by Christ, and modelled by the Macedonian churches (8:1-2). Paul's own willingness to suffer on behalf of his churches serves as a further example of Christian love.[68]

7. Paul's attitude to suffering was complex. At various places in 2 Corinthians, Paul indicates that he dreaded suffering, and was quite fearful of it.[69] Yet, at the same time, Paul says that he delights in "*weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties*" (12:10). The reason for this "delight" is that suffering taught Paul humility (12:7), and allowed God's power to be manifested in his life (12:8-10). Mak suggests that these conflicting elements in Paul's attitude toward suffering can be reconciled. Despite the fact that Paul feared and dreaded his various afflictions, he was able to welcome them, because he recognised God at work in his sufferings to bring good out of evil.[70]

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[66] Kruse, "Afflictions, Trials, Hardships", p. 20.
[67] Manus, "Apostolic Suffering", p. 50.
[68] Hafemann, "Suffering", p. 920.
[69] Mak, "Toward a Holistic View of Pauline Suffering", p. 273. See 2 Cor 1:8; 4:16-17; 5:3; 11:27-29; 12:8.
[70] Ibid., p. 274.

Lessons for Melanesia

(a) Suffering can be Viewed Positively

While there are some Melanesian Christian leaders, who have adopted a positive view of suffering,[71] this is yet to occur among the Christian populace, as a whole. No doubt, this is largely a function of the strong traditional belief that suffering always has an evil source.[72]

In the introduction, it was stated that suffering is almost always attributed to punishment for some wrongdoing. This punishment is mediated through evil spirits, or the violent acts of other humans. This concept of "pay-back" governs the entire life of a Melanesian, and has been referred to by some as "retributive logic".[73] It teaches that all acts, whether good or bad, must be repaid in kind. Conversely, this means that the circumstances one experiences are the result of the acts one has performed, and, thus, sickness, death, success, etc., are explained in this way.[74] The good person, because he is good, does not suffer.[75]

The lessons from 2 Cor challenge this perception of reality. While it is true that Paul did, at times, attribute suffering to punishment for sins,[76] it is clear, from these writings, that his understanding of suffering was, on the whole, far more positive.

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[71] See, for example, Joshua K. Daimoi, "Struggles Faced in Living God's Kingdom: Papua New Guinea and Irian Jaya", in John D'Arcy May, ed., *Living Theology in Melanesia: a Reader, Point* 8 (1985), p. 124.

[72] Theo Aerts, "Prayers of the Past", in "Prayers of the Past", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 4-1 (1988), pp. 28-79. This article contains a comprehensive listing of pre-Christian prayers of various tribes in Papua New Guinea. A predominant theme in these prayers is seeking protection from evil, and the suffering associated with it.

[73] Garry W. Trompf, "Retributive Logic in Melanesian Belief", in *Religion in Melanesia*, Garry W. Trompf, and C. E. Loeliger, eds, Port Moresby PNG: University of PNG, 1980, pp. 96f.

[74] Fugmann, "Fundamental Issues", p. 89.

[75] Stilwell, "Towards a Melanesian Theology of Conversion", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 9-1 (1993), p. 41.

[76] See p. 67, n. 15.

The many affirmative purposes that Paul ascribes to suffering, not to mention the example of the life of Christ Himself, must be used to broaden the Melanesian attitude to suffering. Paul clearly teaches that the innocent do suffer, and that this suffering can be used by God for His glory. Suffering does not necessarily indicate the presence of sin in the life of the person who suffers.

The primary lesson, then, that needs to be taught to Melanesian Christians, about suffering from 2 Cor, is that God sometimes allows suffering for good. God can, and does, use suffering to achieve His purposes, such as those, which were listed earlier. Paul's life, and that of the One he imitates, Jesus Christ, become clear demonstrations that suffering does not automatically result from sin, or is due to punishment. In fact, suffering can even be the vehicle for the manifestation of God's power.

(b) Weakness and Power

The issue of power is critical for Melanesians. This is because their world is conceptualised in mythical terms, where reality came into being, as a result of the deeds of supernatural beings. For the people of primal societies in Melanesia, this reality is mirrored in the relationships between humans, deities, spirits, and the natural environment. As loss or trial occurs, the original revelation of the myth is re-enacted, through ritual, in an attempt to access spiritual power, known as *mana*, so as to achieve a renewal of life, a new beginning.[77]

The out-working of this concept, in the lives of Melanesian Christians, is often seen "in the pursuit of God's power for practical everyday life . . . the power to find lost pigs . . . to foresee approaching troubles, and identify enemies".[78] Therefore, a basis exists for the Melanesian to appreciate Paul's teaching on the relationship between weakness and power, although some

[77] Fugmann, "Fundamental Issues", pp. 74-75. Stilwell, "Towards a Melanesian Theology of Conversion", p. 34.
[78] Teske, "Worship the Father in Spirit and Truth", p. 244.

important clarifications are necessary. We can expect to witness God's power, in the face of sickness, trial, or loss, but this power may not necessarily be evident in deliverance or healing. God's power is manifested in human weakness, as a demonstration, and authentication, of the gospel. It must be understood that the story of Christ is of One, who suffered and died; and then, through the power of God, was raised from the dead. The cross of Christ is the paradigm for a Christian understanding of both suffering and power. Suffering, in the life of the believer, can be viewed as a demonstration of the reality of the cross.

(c) The Believer and Suffering

Paul teaches us that we can expect to share in the sufferings of Christ, and, indeed, that suffering should be seen as a legitimate sign of a servant of God. Suffering thus changes from being a sign of punishment to a badge of honour, worn for Christ.[79] This should not be construed to teach a martyr theology – suffering is not to be sought for its own sake. While Paul did not run from affliction, or necessarily ascribe it to divine wrath, he nevertheless displayed a dread and fear of it.

The importance of relationships, in the Melanesian worldview, can be utilised to teach that life, for a Melanesian Christian, can only be spoken of in terms of relationship to Christ.[80] This means that Christ not only becomes the model for a Melanesian attitude to suffering, but that He provides the correct perspective, from which to view suffering. Christ willingly suffered and died so that the Father's purpose might be achieved. Christ was able to look beyond the cross to His future glory. Paul demonstrated this same future orientation.

[79] Black, "Weakness", p. 966.
[80] Fugmann, "Fundamental Issues", pp. 94-95.

(d) Suffering and the Future Hope

A mythical worldview strongly links the past with the present.[81] This means that a central concern for Melanesian religions is to revitalise those forces from the past, so that life can be experienced in the present.[82] Obviously, then, the Melanesian focuses on these two aspects of time – past and present. This creates difficulties in understanding suffering, as Paul sees it. It is necessary for the Melanesian Christian to reorient his thinking on suffering to become more eschatological. This is not to say that the past and present must be ignored. However, so that sufferings can be understood in the way that Paul teaches in 2 Corinthians, they must be seen in the context of eternity, and of the future glory that awaits believers.

Conclusion

Paul's teaching on suffering in 2 Corinthians was not an abstract theology, but the fruit of spiritual reflection on his extensive personal experience of many and varied afflictions. This reflection had, as its locus, the cross of Christ. As a result, Paul's sufferings provide a model for Christians in Melanesia. His response to his afflictions, and his understanding of their purpose in the divine plan, indicate that it is possible for the Christian to view suffering positively. Indeed, suffering may even be seen as the authenticating mark of a genuine Christian ministry.

This conflicts with the traditional Melanesian understanding of suffering, and, therefore, requires careful consideration by Melanesian Christians. This is particularly a challenge, in the concepts of "payback" and "power". The good person can suffer, and this does not necessarily indicate an absence of God's power. Instead, God's power can become evident in this weakness.

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[81] See J. McCarthy, *Legends of Papua New Guinea*, Adelaide SA: Rigby, 1973, for numerous examples of this.

[82] Fugmann, "Fundamental Issues", p. 76.

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