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**Towards a Contextual Theology for Spiritual Growth
in the Kara-Nalik area of New Ireland Province**

Peter Ian Matayai

**Towards a Contextual Theology of Blood, Ancestors,
and Spirits on Manus Island**

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**Towards a Contextual Theology of Bride-Price
in Simbu Province**

Chris Pati

Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools



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MELANESIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools

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

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

The opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors, and do not necessarily represent the views of the Editor, Editorial Team, or the member colleges of MATS. All articles have been edited to meet the requirements of the Journal.

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CONTENTS

Editorial	4
Towards a Contextual Theology for Spiritual Growth in the Kara-Nalik Area of the New Ireland Province Peter Ian Matayai.....	5
Towards a Contextual Theology of Blood, Ancestors, and Spirits on Manus Island Francis Kolpai.....	47
Towards a Contextual Theology of Bride-price in the Simbu Province Chris Pati.....	87

EDITORIAL

The focus of this Journal is contextualisation, applying God's unchanging truth in the differentiated cultures of man. The articles are Bachelor of Theology papers, written by students at the Christian Leaders' Training College in Papua New Guinea. Just as the Bible has to be contextualised to be correctly and fully understood, these authors offer contextualisation insights worthy of Melanesian contexts.

Peter Ian Matayai looks into his own culture in the New Ireland Province, emphasising the historical lack of contextualisation, which has led to anaemic spiritual growth of his people. After describing several models of contextualisation, he proposes several cultural beliefs and practices that could be used in a contextually-appropriate manner to emphasise biblical truth: sacrifice, remembering the dead, peace mediator, and the significance of the first-born.

Francis Kolpai analyses the meaning of blood among the people of Ndranou, on Manus Island, showing its importance in relationship to ancestral spirits. He offers several ways to contextualise the meaning of blood – including relationships, inherited character traits, and adoption. The article offers a cultural insider's perspectives towards contextualised soteriology in light of Ndranou beliefs.

Chris Pati offers a constructive look at bride-price in the Simbu Province. Bride-price continues to be a topic of discussion in Papua New Guinea, both biblically and practically. The article by Chris is short, but meaningful – offering insight into the impact of the cultural practice of bride-price.

Not everyone will agree with the conclusions reached by the authors. However, we hope that, as you grapple with the issues, the thoughts of the authors will help you grow in your understanding of what God's Word says to your life and culture.

Doug Hanson.

TOWARDS A CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH IN THE KARA-NALIK AREA OF NEW IRELAND PROVINCE

Peter Ian Matayai

Peter received a Bachelor of Theology degree from the Christian Leaders' Training College in 2008. This article was his Bachelor thesis. After graduation, he returned to the New Ireland Province and began translating scripture until his untimely death, early in 2009. This Journal edition is dedicated to his memory.

INTRODUCTION

New Ireland is situated in north-eastern Papua New Guinea (PNG), and is part of the Bismarck Archipelago in the south-western Pacific Ocean. The island was first discovered in 1616, and later became a German protectorate from 1884 to 1914. It was subsequently administered by Australia until 1975, when it became a province of the newly-independent state of PNG.¹

A century ago, something wonderful happened in the East-coast Kara-Nalik² area in New Ireland Province. It was the planting of the gospel of Christ, after the inauguration of Christianity into PNG in 1847³ by missionaries to Woodlark Island, Milne Bay Province.⁴ But, to date, there is little evidence of that gospel growing in people's lives. Many believe that the cause of this problem lies in the early missionaries' lack of proper contextualisation. But, when some contemporary Christians tried to correct

¹ "New Ireland", in *Microsoft® Encarta®* 2006 [CD-ROM], Redmond WA: Microsoft Corporation, 2005.

² The East-coast Kara-Nalik area consists of 23 villages, with a population of over 10,000 people. This figure is based on population data of the year 2000, which is 9,288, made up of males: 5,023, and females: 4,265. Manager of Tikana Local Level government, Ure Ao, interview by author, September 15, 2008.

³ Hosea Linge, *An Offering Fit for a King*, Neville Threlfall, tran. (Rabaul PNG: Toksave na Buk Dipatmen, 1978), p. 120.

⁴ Neville Threlfall, *One Hundred Years in the Islands* (Rabaul PNG: Toksave na Buk Dipatmen, 1975), pp. 34-36.

the dilemma, by getting to know the people's belief system, and then working to contextualise the gospel message, the people were afraid, because they believed that contextualisation would only lead to syncretism. This confusion and fear is a hindrance to growth, and the issue needs to be addressed, so that spiritual growth can be experienced.

The aim of this thesis is to firstly present an overview of the development of Christianity in the Kara-Nalik area since its advent, and, secondly, to endeavour to explore how theology can be contextualised to assist spiritual growth among Christians in this community. Initially, a theoretical approach will be taken, followed by strategies for practical application.

AN OVERVIEW OF CHRISTIANITY IN KARA-NALIK

The aim of this section is to present a brief overview of Christianity in Kara-Nalik. It will discuss its emergence, the people's understanding prior to the gospel, an analysis of the early missionaries' influence, the contemporary identity of Christianity in the area, and why contextual theology needs to be elucidated and advanced.

EMERGENCE OF CHRISTIANITY

The advent of Christianity in the Kara-Nalik area occurred in 1905, when Methodist missionaries⁵ came, under the leadership of Earnest Sprott, a German lay evangelist.⁶ On February 19, 1912,⁷ Roman Catholic missionaries, under Fr Pickle, came, so that today Methodism⁸ and Roman Catholicism are the two major denominations in Kara-Nalik, and in the province as a whole. Christianity has, therefore, been in the Kara-Nalik area for 103 years.

⁵ Emosi Verebesanga and Penias Kuribura are from Fiji, while Iosopat ToNunuar and Ioap ToLulungan are from Rabaul, East New Britain Province.

⁶ Revd Robinson Moses of Munavai, interview by author, August 5, 2008.

⁷ Anastasia Vevin of Lemakot village, interview by author, January 30, 2008.

⁸ The name Methodist has been changed, and is now the United church, after merging with the London Missionary Society in Papua.

THE PEOPLE'S UNDERSTANDING ANTEDATES THE GOSPEL

Before the gospel came, the Kara-Nalik people were heathens and cannibals. They worshipped spirits⁹ and ancestors,¹⁰ and called on them for power, security, and blessings for their daily needs. Above these spirits, only one was considered to be greater, the creator of the universe. That great one is called *Maraolia*,¹¹ or *Vulmusung*.¹² Although the people lived in darkness, they still had knowledge of a divine and superior being, who controlled everything. Furthermore, even in the midst of cannibalism, they had traditional laws that protected and guided them in regard to relationships, roles, and obligations, in the immediate biological family unit, to distant relatives, and to the community as a whole.

THE EARLY MISSIONARIES' IMPACT ON THE PEOPLE

When the early missionaries came, they taught the indigenous people about the one true God. In the process, they condemned and discouraged the cultural beliefs and practices of the people. Their ethnocentricity, and sheer ignorance of the people's beliefs and culture, resulted in failure, rather than in genuine spiritual orientation and growth. They should have embraced the people's culture and worldview, and then utilised these tools to contextualise the Word of God to create true understanding within people's lives.

People, back then, were confused about who *Yaasu* was.¹³ The Lemakot people even called Fr Pickle, *Yaasu*.¹⁴ There was no real impact of Christianity upon the lives of the indigenous people. Although these

⁹ The indigenous people believed that there are geographical spirits, elemental spirits, clan and tribal spirits, spirits of seasons, disaster, and blessings.

¹⁰ Ancestral spirits are understood by the people to be different to the spirits already mentioned. Ancestral spirits are the protectors, and the source of blessings, but they can also cause sickness, death, and environmental disaster, if they are upset or disturbed.

¹¹ *Maraolia*, in the Kara-Nalik area language, literally means "earthquake". They believe that this spirit is so great and powerful that it shakes the very foundations of the earth. Stanis Kasorot, of Lemakot, interview by author, April 23, 2008.

¹² *Vulmusung*, also in the Kara-Nalik area language, means "the source of abundance of all good things", or, "The good and great provider". Kasorot, interview, April 23, 2008.

¹³ *Yaasu* is the Kara-Nalik rendition of the name "Jesus".

¹⁴ Edward Laboran, of Lemakot, interview by author, March 2, 2008.

missionaries were fulfilling God's Great Commission,¹⁵ they failed to acknowledge and follow Jesus' and Paul's style of evangelisation, that is, to begin from the people's point of view, and contextualise the message. Many people only attended church because the missionaries required them to do so. Still others came out of fear. As Robinson asserts, "Verebesanga¹⁶ was a very strict man, and he exhibited a legalistic form of Christianity. People who missed Sunday worship were beaten."¹⁷ The people came to church, not because they were transformed by the Word, but were forced by the missionaries. Syncretism was also rife, and has coexisted with true Christianity throughout these 103 years. In short, the early missionaries did not make much positive impact with the gospel on the lives of the Kara-Nalik people.

THE CONTEMPORARY IDENTITY OF CHRISTIANITY

What then is the true identity of Christianity in contemporary Kara-Nalik? Today, the church is experiencing an era of nominalism. Many people are just churchgoers, without real conviction, repentance, change of allegiance, and submission to Christ. Such people believe in a works-based salvation. They have not yet come to know the true way to salvation. Others have surrendered their lives to the Lordship of Christ in evangelistic crusades, but have backslidden, and are living defeated lives, because of no proper counselling and follow-up by church workers. Socio-economical development has also contributed to this nominalistic trend. "Many people, today, are no longer attending church, except for a few elderly people. Alcohol, drugs, sex, and other worldly entertainments today enslave many young people, causing them to have no full commitment to Christ."¹⁸

Most importantly, nominalism exists, because of the lack of proper contextualisation of biblical teaching to the people's level of understanding. Many pastors and ministers today love preaching to their congregations

¹⁵ See Matt. 28: 18-20; Mark 16: 15; Luke 24: 47-48; Acts 1: 8.

¹⁶ Refer footnote 5.

¹⁷ Revd Robinson Moses, of Munavai, interview by author, August 5, 2008.

¹⁸ Revd Joe Kasou, of Djaul, interview by author, September 10, 2008.

with a smattering of English and Melanesian Pidgin,¹⁹ and tend to ignore their vernacular, which is a more-powerful means of effective communication. They like to use complicated theological terminologies, which are meaningless to grass-roots people. Unfortunately, many pastors and lay preachers are not properly trained. They have never taken formal training in Bible schools, thus creating heresy, immaturity, syncretism, and divisions.

CONTEXTUALISED THEOLOGY IS NEEDED

Concerned Christians took action, when they identified the above-mentioned gloomy realities, which continue to overshadow the Christian faith. Apart from other Christian ministries, and methods of evangelisation, they embarked on Bible translation work. This was done to help people truly grasp and understand God's Word, and repel the dark clouds of unbelief, spiritual dwarfism, syncretism, and nominalism that are taking their toll upon the inhabitants of Kara-Nalik.

After 19 years of Bible translation work, undertaken by an American couple, Perry and Virginia Schlie,²⁰ working with Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), and situated in Lemakot village, the situation has not yet changed for the better. The Kara people are not using the translated Bible. While in the Nalik area, no attempt has been made to adapt the translated Kara scripture into their language. The author has been burdened about this matter, causing him to interview several people in the Kara locality, to ascertain why they are not using the *Turoxioian Fa'ui Sina Piran*.²¹ It is their response that has prompted him to address the situation in this paper. One elderly man²² replied that our language and culture are all demonic,

¹⁹ There is no intention to condemn the English and Melanesian Pidgin languages here, because it is understood that pastors and ministers from totally different languages and cultures work in yet other congregations with another languages and cultures.

²⁰ Perry and Virginia Schlie arrived in Lemakot in April, 1978. The Kara Bible was completed and dedicated in 1997. Virginia Schlie, of the United States, interview by author, September 10, 2008.

²¹ *Turoxioian Fa'ui Sina Piran* is the title of the Kara vernacular Bible, and it literally means "God's New Contract or Agreement".

²² Louie Lapuk is a community leader of Lemakot village.

and that the Word of God is too holy to be written in it.²³ The author believes that this one voice is echoing the voice of the many silent indigenous people in the Kara area. And so, if Christianity in Kara-Nalik is to have an effective and lasting impact on its inhabitants, then the task of contextual theology has to be elucidated, and advanced without delay.

ELUCIDATING CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

Despite Christianity being in the Kara-Nalik area for the last 103 years, there is little evidence of genuine spiritual development in individual lives, and in the church. To change the course of this spiritual dilemma, Bible translation was done to help people understand God's Word, so that it will transform their lives. But, despite the completion of this laborious project, the people are not using the Bible. Many do not understand why the Word has to be contextualised, rather than just using English and Pidgin Bible. Therefore, the purpose of this section is to elucidate what contextual theology is all about: its meaning, forms, function, continuity, and its danger in syncretism.

DEFINING CONTEXTUALISATION

Shoki Coe coined the word "contextualisation" in 1972, at the World Council of Churches' consultation held in Lausanne.²⁴ He comments,

By contextualisation, we mean the wrestling with God's word in such a way that the power of the incarnation, which is the divine form of contextualisation, can enable us to follow His steps to contextualise.²⁵

This means, Christians are to work hard in understanding God's Word, so they can see the significance of contextualisation, as manifested by Christ

²³ What this elderly man said is the direct result of the teachings of the early missionaries.

²⁴ Charles H. Kraft, "Contextualisation Theory in Euro-American Missiology", in *World Evangelisation* 5-80 (1997), p. 10.

²⁵ Shoki Coe, *Theological Education*, p. 11 (Geneva: World Council of Churches), quoted in Ilaita S Tuwere, "What is Contextual Theology", in *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 2-27 (2002), p. 9.

in becoming human. Upon seeing what Christ has done, we can, likewise, reveal God's truth in this manner.

The word was not easily welcomed at first, because some evangelical theologians prefer the terms "indigenisation", "adaptation", and "accommodation". Indigenisation is concerned about correlating the gospel with past traditions, and not taking serious consideration of the effects and changes brought about by globalisation.²⁶ The adaptation and accommodation theory believes that the gospel, when first brought to Christian fields, was totally pure and unadapted, and so these terms are employed to describe the process of furnishing the gospel to societies that are not oriented with Christian culture.²⁷

Many theologians have different definitions of what this neologism "contextualisation" means. Hitchen defines it as:

In essence, contextualisation is all that is involved in faithfully applying the Word of God in a modern setting. In contextualisation, we go, with all our culturally-acquired assumptions, experience, and agenda, to the scriptures, with their different cultural backgrounds, presuppositions, and priorities. We hear for ourselves the same living message God intended for the first readers, so that we can then go to people, in yet another cultural setting, with yet another list of action priorities, and explain the biblical message, so that they receive it with the same impact as it held for the first readers.²⁸

Sookhdeo asserts:

Contextualisation may be understood as the expression of the gospel through appropriate forms within the culture of its recipients. While not an easy task, contextualisation endeavours to distinguish between the content of the gospel, and the forms, which express it. The

²⁶ Ibid, p. 8.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 9.

²⁸ John M. Hitchen, "Culture and The Bible – The Question Of Contextualisation", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 8-2 (1992), p. 30.

gospel is God-given, and so is of universal application, while culture is relative to time and place. The process of contextualisation recognises that all cultures contain elements, which oppose or compromise the gospel. Contextualisation is, therefore, committed to the gospel, controlling its forms of expression. Syncretism reverses this priority.²⁹

Despite the different meanings of the word in the above-mentioned quotes, the core factors of Christianity and culture remain the same.

Contextualisation indicates action. It involves believers and unbelievers continuously exchanging information.³⁰ However, the information needs to be defined and simplified. Contextualisation employs different forms of communicating and receiving information. They are through images, languages, and metaphors. Here are three examples for each form. (1) Image form – God communicated His message of love to us in the form of a person,³¹ His son Jesus Christ. Jesus did not only verbally communicate God’s words, but He even went to the extreme of physically demonstrating that message of love on the cross.³² (2) Language form – we pass and perceive information through the medium of language. God communicated with humanity (Jews) through Christ in human language (Aramaic), spoken verbally, and preserved in literature. (3) Metaphorical form – the Lion from the tribe of Judah (Rev 5:5). Jesus is here referred to as a Lion.

The primary function of contextualisation is to simplify and make obscure information – both literal and metaphorical – clear to any group of people. It is concerned with making foreign truths and ideas known in an absolutely different culture. Contextualisation is a fundamental factor of being human, and we cannot do without it.

²⁹ Patrick Sookhdeo, “Issues in Contextualisation”, in *World Evangelisation* 5-80 (1997), p. 4.

³⁰ Fegus MacDonald, “Lausanne Revisits Contextualisation”, in *World Evangelisation* 5-80 (1997), p. 3.

³¹ See Matt 1:18-25.

³² Heather McLean, “Introduction to Translation Principles” (class notes, Banz PNG: Christian Leaders’ Training College, 2008), p. 4. See John 3:16.

The three factors, referred to above, are not all that we need to elucidate, in regards to contextualisation. We also need to look at its parameters, and the fear of syncretism that is inevitable in it. In contextualisation, there are no boundaries, where we stop and just use the old scripture translations as absolutes. For example, many Kara-Nalik people today prefer the English and Pidgin Bible to their vernacular Bible.³³ Although English and Pidgin are favoured, Pidgin unfortunately takes lesser precedence.

THE CONTINUITY OF CONTEXTUALISATION

The task of contextualisation has no limits because it is a very significant characteristic component of being human. No living and psychologically-sound person can deny the reality of globalisation, and its continuum of advances and effects in our once-closed Kara-Nalik society. Globalisation comes with its own good and bad consequences.

Modernity is the most powerful global culture. “Outwardly, it encircles the planet; inwardly, it encompasses more and more of each individual’s life. Its massiveness and permanence threaten us with captivity.”³⁴ This culture is truly pervasive. It not only envelops people’s lives, but will also result in ethnocide. Ethnocide is evil, because it absolutely erases our multicultural diversities, which signifies God’s wisdom and creativity in humanity. “Some people, groups, or governments oppose globalisation in its entirety.”³⁵ Their arguments can truly be based upon the negative results of this trend. But they also have to be pragmatic, and see that humanity cannot hold back the advance of this force in the secular and Christian world. By this truth, we must see that contextualisation is also a culture that is continuous. It is vital to ensure that people know God’s unchangeable truth in this ever-changing world. We cannot keep focusing on past and present culture, but we can continue to contextualise the Bible, to meaningfully communicate the gospel in every generation. If we do not

³³ The vernacular Bible, mentioned here, is only for the Kara people. There is still no translated scripture in the Nalik area.

³⁴ Oswald Guinness, “Reflections on Modernity”, in *World Evangelisation* 18-65 (1993), p. 8.

³⁵ “Globalisation”, in *Microsoft® Encarta® 2006* [CD-ROM], Redmond WA: Microsoft Corporation, 2005.

embrace and advance contextualisation, then we will lose more lives to the devil's kingdom. The more we see our languages and cultures experiencing change, the more we must take contextualisation seriously.

Contextualising theology is a critical need, if radical change is to be experienced in the churches in Kara-Nalik. Contextualisation is not only needed to deal with the past animistic religious system, but it is also relevant to address the needs of current and future generations, in deepening their faith in Christ.

Modernity will mar or annihilate the truth about God, and our relationship with Him. But contextualisation, on the other hand, seeks to shed light, revitalise, and advance people's knowledge about God, and their faith in Him. Contextualisation is a journey; we will never come to a destination.

SYNCRETISM: THE OPPOSITE OF CONTEXTUALISATION

Syncretism runs parallel to contextualisation, but is its enemy, because it perverts its goal of effective and meaningful presentation of God to the people. Before discussing its meaning, historical presence, and effects on Christianity, and its existence and impact upon Kara-Nalik, we will first look at two case studies, one from a United church pastor, and another from a Roman Catholic church member. The United church pastor's experience was related thus:

In 1985, the pastor became sick. Christians prayed for him, but, after seeing no change in his health, he decided to visit a shaman. Interestingly, this shaman was also a lay preacher. According to the pastor, when he was with the medium, he heard him talking to the spirits. The pastor only heard the medium talking, but there was no audible response from the spirits. The pastor was not healed.³⁶

The Catholic person said:

³⁶ Pastor Jonathan Meli, of Fangalava village, interview by author, June 15, 2008.

Every Easter time, after the fire³⁷ has burned out, leaving only embers, ashes, charcoal, and pieces of firewood, the people come and collect them. Also, at that time, after the priest has baptised the babies, people come and fetch water from the baptismal basin to take home.³⁸

The intention of these stories is to reveal the daily and yearly realities of Christianity in Kara-Nalik. From the first story, we see a pastor seeking help from another preacher, who was also a shaman. In the second account, the people collect all those things, for the purposes of healing and protection. These related stories are clear evidence of syncretism in the Kara-Nalik churches.

SYNCRETISM DEFINED

Schwarz comments, “One of the chief hindrances to contextualisation is fear of syncretism.”³⁹ The *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* defines syncretism as:

The process, by which elements of one religion are assimilated into another religion, resulting in a change in the fundamental tenets or nature of those religions. . . . Syncretism, as the Christian gospel occurs, when critical or basic elements of the gospel are replaced by religious elements from the host culture.⁴⁰

Nicholls states that syncretism may be both an intentional and unconscious assimilation of Christian and animistic beliefs.⁴¹ Although this statement is true, it is only partially true to the context of Kara-Nalik. It is true that the existence and continuity of syncretism in Kara-Nalik is not intentional, but

³⁷ In Roman Catholicism, a fire is always lit on Easter night as part of the church’s ritual to symbolise light in Christianity. It is called *Paia b’long Petrus* in Melanesian Pidgin.

³⁸ Steven Taxapan, of Lemakot, interview by author, June 17, 2008.

³⁹ Brian Schwarz, ed., *An Introduction to Ministry in Melanesia Point 7* (1984), p. 111.

⁴⁰ “Syncretism”, in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Walter A. Elwell, ed. (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 1062. Quoted in Bartle, *Death, Witchcraft, and the Spirit World in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea Point 29* (2005), p. 73.

⁴¹ Bruce J. Nicholls, *Contextualisation: A Theology of Gospel and Culture* (Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1979), p. 30.

is an act of unconscious assimilation. This claim is validated by the fact that most people in the specified area are not truly grounded in the scriptures. The reason for this is that many pastors and lay preachers are not properly trained⁴² to truly expound the Bible. Secondly, the gospel is presented in a smattering of English and Pidgin languages, and is not clearly understood. And, finally, individuals are not interested in studying the Word of God.

Contextual theology is so important if syncretism is to be curbed. The Kara-Nalik churches must confront syncretism; otherwise we will “find ourselves, before long, exceedingly rich in religion, and exceedingly poor in real Christianity”.⁴³ The prophet Jeremiah said, people who engage in syncretism would find themselves poor, degenerated, and confused.⁴⁴

The first syncretistic crisis of Judaism happened before the Exile, where the prophets had to combat idolatry. In idolatry, not only was Yahweh worshipped, but veneration of other gods also existed, and Yahweh was just seen as a part of a large pantheon of gods.⁴⁵ This act totally contradicted God’s command.⁴⁶ The Kara-Nalik people should worship God alone, and not their demi-gods.⁴⁷

Syncretism prevailed throughout OT times, and into the NT era. Paul confronted syncretistic beliefs and practices in the churches in Galatia and at Colossae. In Galatia, he had to confront and refute some false Jewish teachers,⁴⁸ who were enforcing the code of circumcision⁴⁹ upon Gentile Christians. Although circumcision is not practised in Kara-Nalik churches, as a means of salvation, some people believe in attaining salvation by

⁴² Many congregations of the United church in Kara-Nalik are without pastors.

⁴³ W. A. Visser ’t Hooft, *No Other Name* (London UK: SCM Press, 1963), p. 9.

⁴⁴ See Jer 2:21-23.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴⁶ See Deut 4:35.

⁴⁷ The little gods, to which people call, for healing, gardening, fishing, hunting, singing, and dancing, power, protection, aphrodisiac magic, prosperity, and sorcery.

⁴⁸ See Acts 15:5; 2 Cor 11:26; Gal 1:7; 2:4. These people are Jewish Christians. They are also called Judaisers.

⁴⁹ See Gal 3:1-5; 4:8-9; 5:1-4,6. Circumcision was only valid in Old Testament times.

works. This is a common cultural Melanesian perception, which has been carried on into the Christian realm.

Paul also confronted the Colossian Christians by challenging the so-called Colossian philosophy. This syncretistic practice came from local folk beliefs, and was negatively impacting converts to Christianity.⁵⁰ Christianity in Kara-Nalik is also experiencing all sorts of teaching from different mushroom ministries.⁵¹ These teachers are misleading the people by indoctrinating them with false hopes of prosperity. This teaching is called the “prosperity gospel”. It is a “theological current that states that if certain principles are followed, the expiatory work of Christ guarantees, to all who believe, divine healing, the riches of this world, and happiness without suffering”.⁵² Still others instruct their followers to abstain from certain things, and follow certain human rituals that are not in accordance with scripture. Krass comments:

As the church seeks to express its life in local cultural forms, it soon has to face the problem of cultural elements, which are either evil or have evil associations. How should the church react to these? Elements that are intrinsically false or evil clearly cannot be assimilated into Christianity without a lapse into syncretism. This is a danger for all churches in all cultures.⁵³

This is a factual comment. But what the Kara-Nalik churches should do, in the face of this reality is not to back off, but, rather, enter it with the gospel, believing that the Word will, in itself, maintain its purity. If the churches eschew contextualisation, for fear of syncretism, as is the current case in other denominations apart from Catholicism, then that is a blunt and heretical approach. These churches must realise that syncretism is an

⁵⁰ Clinton E. Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1996), p. 238. See Col 2:1-23.

⁵¹ A mushroom ministry refers to ministries that suddenly appear and disappear. They do not last.

⁵² J. N. Saracco, “Prosperity theology”, in *Dictionary of Evangelical Foundation*, John Corrie, ed. (Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2007), p. 322.

⁵³ Alfred C. Krass, “The Danger of Syncretism”, in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, J. D. Douglas, ed. (Minneapolis MN: World Wide Publications, 1975), p. 28.

inevitable force, whichever way you go. If contextualisation is not done, then syncretism will still exist, because people will not understand the Word, and begin to mix animistic beliefs with Christian tenets. On the other hand, when we contextualise, we will also be in danger of syncretism, as implied by Krass.

And so, contextual theology is about the faithful communication of the gospel, in understandable terms, appropriate to the audience. However, running parallel to it, is the destructive force of syncretism. Whilst contextualisation means the cultivation of good seeds (God's Word), syncretism, on the other hand, is the cultivation of weeds (evil animistic beliefs).⁵⁴

BIBLICAL MODELS OF CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

Contextual theology is not something new, or something to be afraid of. Its purpose, as discussed in the previous section, is to simplify biblical teaching, so that people can understand God. The purpose of this section is to elucidate contextual theology as a biblical concept.

CONTEXTUALISATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Hesselgrave and Rommen said, "In . . . the Old Testament, we are hard pressed to find examples of cross-cultural communication of a specifically religious message."⁵⁵ However, their claim is not fully accepted here, because there was a lot of contextualisation in the OT era. Cross-cultural communication was done in known cultural forms and practices of the people.

In OT times, when God wanted to talk to His people, He did not shout down from heaven to them, but He used prophets to communicate His words to the people. The prophets did not employ foreign languages and cultures to pass on the message. They contextualised those messages. They spoke the language of their culture, and expressed the message "in

⁵⁴ See Matt 13:24-28.

⁵⁵ David J. Hesselgrave, and Edward Rommen, *Contextualisation* (Leicester UK: IVP, 1989), p. 4.

symbolic actions, and in writing. They spoke in powerful similes, metaphors, and pictorial images. They often used drama, proverbs, dirges, and poems.”⁵⁶

Here are some factual biblical data regarding contextualisation in the OT. Contextualisation was done in different forms. In these examples, the prophets used familiar symbols to communicate God’s message.

The Word of God was communicated in the contextualised forms of similes and metaphors. In Gen 49, Jacob called his sons together and blessed them, using figurative language to speak prophetically over his sons. We can see the use of simile in his speech to Reuben (v 4) and Judah (v 9). Jacob also used metaphor to describe Issachar (v 14), Dan (v 17), Naphtali (v 21), Joseph (v 22), and Benjamin (v 27).

Contextualisation, in the form of translation, was also experienced. King Belshazzar, son of king Nebuchadnezzar, was feasting, and a hand suddenly appeared on the wall, and wrote down four words. The king was astounded for he could not understand the language, and neither did his counsellors. Daniel was consulted, and he translated God’s message to the king.⁵⁷

Another form of contextualisation used is pictorial image. We can see a classic example of this form in use in the prophet Daniel’s life. Here, God communicated future events to Daniel in pictorial images. His message was communicated using earthly images, and things Daniel could understand. God did not use foreign languages, and expressions, unknown to Daniel. That was a perfect model of contextualisation.⁵⁸

The prophets also contextualised God’s message in drama form. Here are two examples of this vehicle of communication. In the first, Hosea contextualised God’s heart, and feelings of sorrow, anger, and love to the

⁵⁶ Saphir Athyal, “The Old Testament Contextualisations”, in *World Evangelisation* 5-80 (1997), p. 9.

⁵⁷ See Dan 4:25-28.

⁵⁸ See Dan 7:2-14 [pictorial image], 7:15-28 [meaning of image]; 8:2-14 [pictorial image], 8:20-26 [meaning of image].

children of Israel, by marrying Gomer. She later left him, and became a prostitute. But, despite having spoiled her character, and being sold in the slave market, Hosea redeemed her, and loved her again.⁵⁹ Hosea's marriage symbolised Israel's unfaithfulness to God. But, despite the people's adulterous behaviour, God still loved and reconciled them to Himself.

Our second example is of Jeremiah, whom the Lord instructed to send His message in symbolic forms. Jeremiah used symbols, which were culturally known, to help people understand God's message. We see this in his purchasing, hiding, and retrieving of a linen belt, which symbolised God's intended judgment on Judah for her stubbornness and idolatry. This same message was also dramatised with a different symbol in 19:1-12 (shattered jar). Jeremiah continued to contextualise God's message in drama form in "a yoke of straps and crossbars"⁶⁰ (27:1-22), "large stones in a brick pavement" (43:8-13), bachelorship (16:1-4), restrictions to enter funeral homes and partake in celebrations (16:5-9), and the purchase of a field (32:6-15). Above all, Jeremiah contextualised the message in the recipient's culture.

These OT prophets delivered their messages in their own cultural forms and experiences, and, by this, they powerfully challenged their people, in every area of life. All in all, in these ways, the prophets and authors of the OT books sought to meaningfully communicate God's heart to the people.

CONTEXTUALISATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the New Testament (NT) era, Christ and His apostles also contextualised God's message. Contextualisation played a significant role in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, the apostle Paul, the gospel writers, and the Holy Spirit.

⁵⁹ See Hos 1:2-3; 2:1-5; 3:1-3.

⁶⁰ All scripture quotations are from the NIV unless otherwise noted.

The incarnation of Christ shows the grandest example of contextualisation, where the world witnessed “the translation of text into context”.⁶¹ What is conveyed here is that Jesus Christ, who is the infinite Word of God, became man, and lived in a particular human culture, at a certain time in the history of humanity.⁶² Nicholls comments,

Jesus’ life and teaching is the supreme model of contextualisation. His command to His disciples involved contextualisation, and whether this was to love one’s neighbour, or to disciple the nations. The implication of this process is seen in the apostolic witness and the life of the church, and in the creation of the new documents themselves.⁶³

Jesus contextualised His teachings in language form, and spoke to the people in the Aramaic language, which was the lingua franca of His day. He also communicated to His listeners through stories, which depicted their everyday experiences. He helped everybody understand His message. He is the master contextualiser. Christ’s command to His apostles to preach the good news⁶⁴ also came with the task of contextualisation. If they were to evangelise other cultures, then they had to know the language, lifestyle, beliefs, and practices of their audience, in order to reach them.

The rapid spread of Christianity in the NT epoch was the result of contextual theology. The apostles communicated the gospel in many forms, such as literature, preaching, teaching, and life. They contextualised God’s Word in the OT, which was written in Hebrew, into *koine* Greek,⁶⁵ the language of the common people.

The apostles expressed God’s truth in the thought patterns of their recipients. This clearly implies that God’s Word was not only meant for

⁶¹ Bruce J. Nicholls, “Contextualisation”, in *New Dictionary of Theology*, Sinclair B. Ferguson, and David F. Wright, eds (Leicester UK: IVP, 1998), p. 164.

⁶² See John 1:1-3, 14, 15, 18.

⁶³ Nicholls, *Contextualisation*, p. 164.

⁶⁴ See Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47-48; Acts 1:8.

⁶⁵ Amos Leana, “Contextualisation” (class notes, Banz PNG: Christian Leaders’ Training College, 2007), p. 13.

scholars, but for all, so that all may receive salvation. God's Word is not only for theologians, but also for every Kara-Nalik soul, irrespective of their social status and level of education.

The four gospels were the products of a contextualising literary activity, with each gospel denoting its author's cultural background, and their audience. Matthew's gospel was specifically written for his Jewish audience. This is reflected in his emphasis on the following themes: Messianic prophecy, kingship, and divine titles of Jesus, which were then only known to the Jewish people. Luke's Hellenistic orientation was manifested in his use of *koine* Greek.⁶⁶ Mark's writing was for a Roman audience, or Gentiles. We can see contextualisation principles displayed in his explanation of "Jewish customs (7:2-4), the translation of Aramaic words (3:17; 5:41; 7:11, 34; 15:22), and special interest in persecution and martyrdom (8:34-38; 13:9-13)".⁶⁷ And, lastly, John's gospel was addressed to believers from different ethnic groups in the early churches, in the countries of Greece and Asia.⁶⁸

The Apostle Paul was a great and effective Christian cross-cultural communicator. He lived and identified with the people, in order to minister God's Word to them, in their own ways of perceiving things, so they could believe in Christ.⁶⁹ In Athens, Paul had to deal with the people of a totally different cultural background and social status. He talked with the common people in the market place, and even to philosophers – the Epicureans and Stoics.⁷⁰ It was true that the Greeks were religious, but they were also worshipping, among other gods, an unknown god. Paul took that

⁶⁶ David J. Hesselgrave, and Edward Rommen, *Contextualisation* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1989), p. 8.

⁶⁷ Introduction to Mark's gospel in *NIV Study Bible*, Kenneth Barker, et al, eds (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1985), p. 1490.

⁶⁸ Les Painter, "John's Good News", in *An EasyEnglish Commentary*, www.easyenglish.info.

⁶⁹ See 1 Cor 9:19-22.

⁷⁰ Paul Mumo Kisau, "Acts", in *Africa Bible Commentary*, Tokunboh Adeyemo, ed. (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2006), p. 1331.

opportunity to reveal God to them.⁷¹ What Paul did is a classic example of contextual theology – to begin from where the people are.

The people of Kara-Nalik are still bound to traditional religion. Many still place their beliefs in spirits and nature. To address this, genuine Christians must consider Paul’s method of approach, and point them to the reality and source of all life.

The Holy Spirit also demonstrated the importance of contextualisation in the NT, when He enabled the apostles to address a multicultural audience in their own languages. This experience resulted in true conviction and radical change of allegiance from polytheism to monotheism.⁷²

CHOOSING THE APPROPRIATE MODEL FOR CONTEXTUALISATION

We have, so far, seen the different forms of contextualisation being employed in the OT and NT in ancient times and cultures. But what appropriate model[s] of this task can we use for the Kara-Nalik context? According to Bevans, there are five models of contextualising theology for Melanesia.

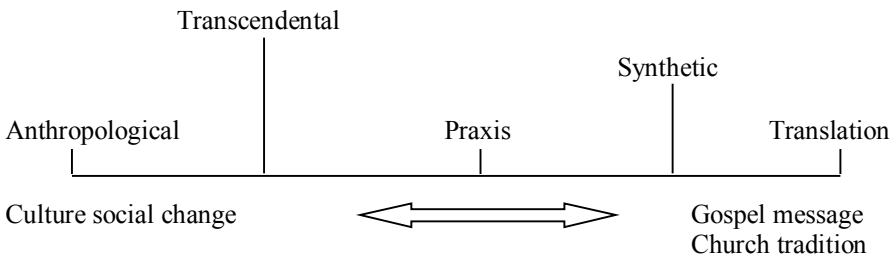


Figure 1: Models for Contextualisation

(1) *The Translation Model* is mainly interested in translating God’s Word into the language and thought forms of the people. Here, culture is

⁷¹ See Acts 17:22-34.

⁷² See Acts 2:1-12, 41-42.

esteemed, but quick and effective communication of the gospel is emphasised more.⁷³

(2) *The Anthropological Model* has a positive view of culture. It sees and understands things from the people's point of view, and then works to reveal reality, from their standpoint. However, if this view is not properly considered, it will blind people to the evil in their culture that ought to be addressed.⁷⁴

(3) *The Praxis Model* concentrates on the cultural changes happening within society. It is not interested in faith, but seeks to identify and implement optimistic approaches, to generate change in society. Here, more emphasis is placed on the concepts of liberation and transformation.⁷⁵

(4) *The Transcendental Model* is based on an individual encounter with God, through reading and hearing His Word, daily experiences, and in cultural ideals.⁷⁶

(5) *The Synthetic Model* binds the factors of gospel, culture, tradition, and social change together. Bevans says, [this model] "tries to preserve the importance of the gospel message, and the heritage of the traditional doctrinal formulations, while, at the same time, acknowledging the vital role that culture has played and can play in theology, even to the setting of the theological agenda".⁷⁷ Here, culture is seen as good and evil. The useful aspects are retained, while the devilish are replaced. The neutral ones must be preserved and enriched. The Lausanne covenant says man's culture is exquisite. But, because of the fall, it is now contaminated with sin.⁷⁸

⁷³ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1992), p. 99. Quoted in Bartle, *Death, Witchcraft, and the Spirit World* Point 29 (2005), p. 99.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁷⁸ Ananda S. Kumar, "The Willowbank Report – Gospel and Culture", in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice* (Minneapolis MN: World Wide Publications, 1975), p. 5.

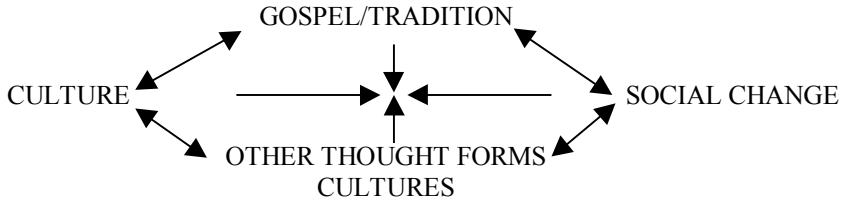


Figure 2: The Synthetic Model

In the synthetic approach, the church seriously considers, observes, and addresses the social issues in the community. It does not work in isolation, but accepts ideas from other cultures, and theological stipulations.⁷⁹

The Kara-Nalik churches should consider all these models, and utilise them, in their endeavour to effectively reach their people with the Word. They should only choose the ones that are appropriate to their context. It is believed, here, that the translation, anthropological, and synthetic models are appropriate for the Kara-Nalik churches. Church leaders must elucidate and advance these models, for they are crucial for generating spiritual growth.

Bartle has also greatly contributed to clarifying this significant topic, by summarising it in the contextual form of a Melanesian architectural design of a house. His visual explanation of this whole concept of contextualisation is profound, yet easy for the Kara-Nalik people to understand. This explanation should compel the churches to realise the significance of contextualisation in proclaiming God's Word.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

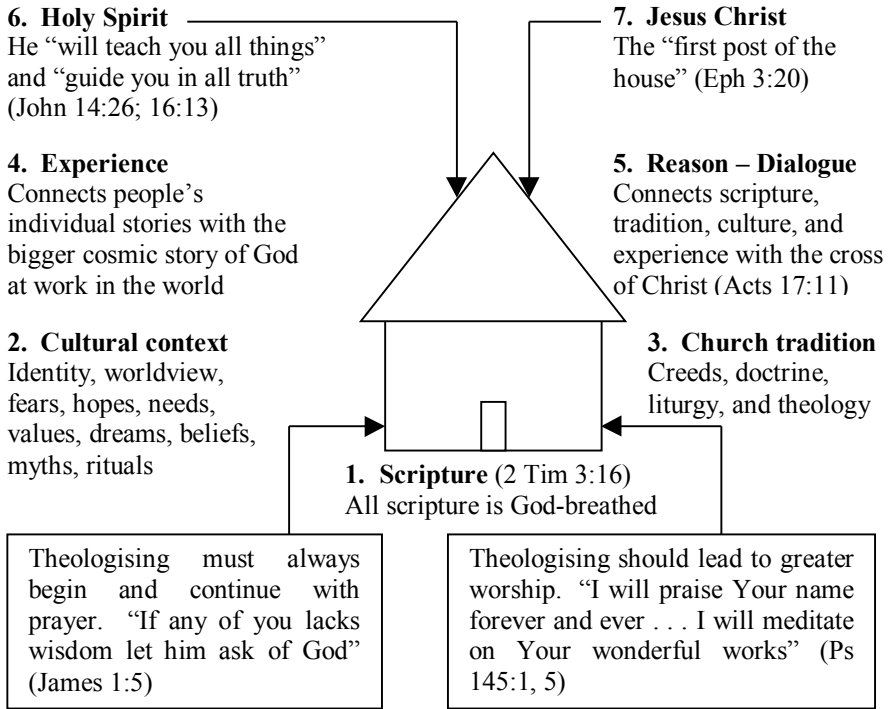


Figure 3: House Model for Contextualising Theology⁸⁰

EXAMPLES OF CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

Many Melanesian churches today still believe that God is not the originator of culture, and that everything in it is bad.⁸¹ As Yambal said, “All culture

⁸⁰ Bartle, *Death, Witchcraft, and the Spirit World*, p. 115.

⁸¹ Pastor Tokau Tobeno, of Lakurumau, Valentine Petali, of Lemakot, and Nalik Giria, of Lakurumau (Papua New Guinea Revival church), interview by author, July 13, 2008. The United church Assembly abolished traditional dances and other cultural practices in worship in the 1970s. Michael Lavakun, of Fangalava, interview by author, October 6, 2008. Owen Raxum, of Lakurumau (Seventh-day Adventist), interview by author, July 15, 2008. Roman Catholics, on the other hand, believed otherwise. Custodia Robol, Juvitha Vanariu, Clematia Oris, and Maria Ulidau, from Lemakot, interview by author, April 9, 2008.

is bad. We must discard it and adopt the [biblical] culture of heaven.”⁸²
But these claims are not accurate, because, as stated by Hill and Hill:

It’s not possible for Christians to move towards one biblical culture, for the simple reason that there is no one biblical culture. The cultural background of nomadic Abraham was very different from that of the Jews in the time of the kings. In the New Testament, Jews were under a colonial power, Rome. Many of the early Christians were Greeks, living in yet another very different background culture. So, which one is the biblical culture?⁸³

There is no one [biblical] culture of heaven. We must know that God is the source of human culture, because He is the one who gave people the mind and ability to forge it. Culture is God’s gift to humanity, and it will live on into eternity. Commenting on Rev 7:9-10; 21:26; 22:2, Stott asserts:

These biblical phrases seem to us to warrant the conviction that heaven will be adorned by the best products of God-given human creativity, that heavenly fellowship will be harmonious and heterogeneous, and that the diversity of languages and cultures will not inhibit, but rather, ennoble the fellowship of the redeemed.⁸⁴

Hitchen further comments that God exalts cultural plurality by way of historical particularity. By showing so clearly in the home of Nazareth that one culture matters to Him, God makes a way to show, beyond the Cross and Pentecost, that every culture matters to Him.⁸⁵

⁸² Michael Yambal, “Preserving Your Christian Liberty”, sermon, Banz PNG: Christian Leaders’ Training College, August 12, 2008.

⁸³ Margaret Hill, and Harriet Hill, *Relevant Bible Use for Today* (Ukarumpa PNG: SIL, 2005), p. 26.

⁸⁴ John Stott, “The Pasadena Consultation – Homogenous Unit”, in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice* (Wheaton IL: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation, 1978), p. 7.

⁸⁵ Hitchen, “Culture and the Bible – The Question of Contextualisation”, p. 34.

The incarnation of Christ was manifested in a human (Jewish) culture, showing that God is interested in it, for that is the means by which He can communicate with us. This truth should challenge negative views of culture, and enable us to see culture as God's preparatory tool for revealing Himself to us. The gospel was presented in human culture, and so they will always juxtapose each other. They cannot be separated. As someone once said, "There is no such thing as a cultureless gospel." This section aims to give some examples of how we can see God at work in the Kara-Nalik culture, and how God's ultimate truth in the Bible can be contextualised to the understanding of our people.

CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING OF A FATHER

The Kara-Nalik people understand the role, obligations, and duty of a father as the source of life.⁸⁶ He is the provider, as seen in his role of gardening, fishing, hunting, and working to earn money to pay for all the necessities of the home. He is the protector. He protects his family from danger. He builds the house to shelter the family from cold, sun, rain, and darkness. He sacrifices for the good, and safety of his family. Everybody feels secure and strong when he is present. A father loves and cares so much for all the needs of his family. He clothes and cares for the family's health. He is a model to his children. The children look up to him, and try to imitate his lifestyle. He works hard to prepare for the future of his children by planting cash crops on the land so that they can benefit from these things. Since Kara-Nalik is a matrilineal society, the children do not inherit land from the father, but from the mother's side. But the father is the main person to till that land and prepare it for the future of his children. The father trains and disciplines his children in preparation for adulthood. The father does all these things as an expression of his love for his children.

Our cultural understanding of father should help us see who God is to us. He is our Heavenly Father,⁸⁷ and the very source of our lives and existence.

⁸⁶ This is through marital relationship, resulting in conception and birth.

⁸⁷ See Ex 4:22; Deut 14:1; 32:5-6; 2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chron 28:6; Matt 5:45; 6:4, 8, 9; Mark 8:38; Luke 2:49; John 6:27, 32, 44-46; 12:26-28; Acts 1:4; Rom 8:14-16; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 6:18; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; Heb 1:5; Jas 1:17; Rev 1:5. For complete references on God as our Father, see *Nave's Compact Topical Bible* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1972), p. 178.

Like our physical fathers, He provides⁸⁸ for all our needs. He is also our protector.⁸⁹ He protects us from dangers and harm from our enemies. It is only in God that we can truly find security and comfort. God loves us so much, because He is love (1 John 4:8).⁹⁰ As Grudem says, “God’s love means that God eternally gives of Himself to others.”⁹¹ He is our model, and we should imitate Him.⁹² Like our fathers, He has also planned for our future inheritance. He has prepared an aesthetic and incomprehensible home and lush garden for us in heaven.⁹³ He loves us so much, and that love is expressed in His training and discipline in life.⁹⁴ He does this to correct and guide us in the right path to maturity. God truly satisfies, and even goes beyond, all the requirements and characteristics of a father, from the Kara-Nalik context.

Contextualising this fundamental truth will have a positive impact upon the lives of the people, and help them understand God in a deeper way. This truth will set them free from superficially knowing Him, to intimately knowing Him as their true Heavenly Father.

CULTURAL CONCEPT OF SALVATION

Xi’ut,⁹⁵ in Kara-Nalik culture, was a means of attaining salvation.⁹⁶ This practice demands the death of someone, for the salvation of the clan.⁹⁷ Although the practice is evil in nature, it has the concept of the sacrificial death of an innocent person for the salvation of many.

⁸⁸ See Ps 104:10-30; 135:6-7; 145:9, 15-16 (physical); Col 2:10; 2 Pet 1:3 (spiritual).

⁸⁹ See Ex 2:23-25; Ps 37:28; 116:6; Prov 2:8; John 17:11-15; 2 Thess 3:3.

⁹⁰ Other references on God’s love: Deut 7:7-8; Ps 106:8; 109:21; Mal 3:6; John 3:16; 14:31; 17:26.

⁹¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Leicester UK: IVP, 1994), 198.

⁹² See Eph 5:1.

⁹³ See Rev 21:1-27; 22:1-5.

⁹⁴ See Prov 3:11-12; Heb 12:5-11.

⁹⁵ *Xi’ut* in Kara-Nalik language means “death by hanging”. *Xi’ut* is only undertaken by females, because of the matrilineal culture.

⁹⁶ Salvation in Kara-Nalik is defined and understood as wealth, prosperity, and *gutpela sindaun* in Melanesian Pidgin. *Gutpela sindaun* here connotes land inheritance, good health, peace, wealth, and plenty of food.

⁹⁷ The Kara-Nalik people regard land as the greatest inheritance, because, on it, they can settle, grow food, and live. Land means salvation, or *gutpela sindaun* to them.

Here, we can see God working, and using this cultural tenet, as a preparatory means to understanding the ultimate reality of Christ's death on the cross of Calvary for our salvation,⁹⁸ a salvation that is far superior to their earthly temporal salvation. Understanding this cultural practice of our ancestors, and then contextualising it with Christ's death, will meaningfully speak to the people of Kara-Nalik.

All inhabitants of Kara-Nalik today reside on land purchased by the blood of their ancestors, through *xi'ut*. The death of their ancestors has permanently secured an inheritance for them, and all the generations to come.

The Bible tells us that Christ is our Great Ancestor. Commenting on Heb 1:1-2, Daimoi says, "Hebrews presents Jesus as the Son of God, within the community of ancestors. Being the Creator and Possessor of all things, His line of ancestorhood reaches beyond Abraham – the father of faith, to Adam – the father of humanity."⁹⁹ He is our ancestor, and has secured for us an eternal inheritance in heaven by His precious blood that was shed on Calvary, just like the blood of our earthly ancestors, which was shed on tree branches. As Daimoi asserts, "Jesus is qualified to be the ancestor of human beings, because He alone can bring the people to glory",¹⁰⁰ or *gutpela sindaun*.¹⁰¹

REMEMBERING THE DEAD

Remembering the dead is a cultural norm in Kara-Nalik. The practice is termed *fangan fut*,¹⁰² or *pak fut*,¹⁰³ and is done occasionally. It is a time when members of a family, clan, and community gather to eat together, to

⁹⁸ See Is 6:10; Luke 19:10; 24:46-47; John 3:14-17; Acts 4:12; 13:26, 38, 39, 47; Eph 1:9-13; 1 Tim 1:15; Titus 3:5-7; 1 John 4:9-10. All scripture references per *Nave's Compact Topical Bible*, p. 422.

⁹⁹ Joshua Kurung Daimoi. "An Exploratory Missiological Study of Melanesian Ancestral Heritage from an Indigenous Evangelical Perspective" (Ph.D. diss., Sydney NSW: University of Sydney, 2004), p. 164.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

¹⁰¹ Refer to footnote 96.

¹⁰² *Fangan fut* in Kara language literally means "eating banana".

¹⁰³ *Pak fut* in Nalik language literally means "to peel [the] banana".

remember a loved one who has died. At this time, ripe bananas and *kulaus*,¹⁰⁴ which are the main ingredients for this particular ceremony, and other foods, are brought together for consumption. Before eating, the chief of the clan will briefly remind everybody again about the purpose of the fellowship meal, even though they already know.

By looking at this cultural activity, it can be seen that it perfectly resembles the Holy Communion ceremony in Christianity. In the Communion service, Christians come together to remember and celebrate the death and resurrection of Christ.¹⁰⁵ In Christendom, the main elements used are bread and wine, which symbolises Christ's body and blood.

If the essence and significance of the Holy Communion ceremony are to be fully understood by the Kara-Nalik people, then it needs to be contextualised. Here, we can contextualise these two things: the elements and the setting of this ceremony. Bread and wine can be substituted with ripe banana and *kulau*. And, instead of meeting in the building, people can come outside, after the Word has been shared, and partake of the Communion, just as it is done in the *fangan* or *pak fut* ceremony.

CULTURAL PRACTICE OF RECONCILIATION AND COMPENSATION

Just like all other societies, Kara-Nalik has its own problems that subsequently result in rebellion, division, fighting, and enmity. But these complications do not last, because there are cultural stipulations to settle problems. The concept of reconciliation and compensation has always been a cultural norm, where enemies are brought together, and their differences are addressed. In this process of reconciliation and compensation, the *memai*¹⁰⁶ of another clan assumes the role of a peace mediator. He is unbiased, and is totally committed to seeing constructive negotiations carried out to restore peace and harmony. He liaises with the warring parties, and talks them into reconciling with each other. When these parties agree, then arrangements are made for a reconciliation feast. In the process of reconciliation, the *memai* and peace mediator will lead the

¹⁰⁴ *Kulau* is Melanesian Pidgin for coconuts that are ready for consumption.

¹⁰⁵ See Matt 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-20; 1 Cor 10:16-17.

¹⁰⁶ *Memai* in Kara-Nalik means "chief" or "leader".

perpetrators to the victim's camp. A very important factor, highlighted in this ceremony, is for the *memai* to hold a *daarum*¹⁰⁷ plant in his hand. The *daarum* is a symbol of peace. During the feast, compensation is then paid for damages or deaths. The compensation payments come in the form of food, pigs, *tangop[s]*,¹⁰⁸ and modern monetary currency.¹⁰⁹

In Christianity, all of mankind has rebelled against God, and become His enemies.¹¹⁰ But God did not create us to be His enemies, and so He made a way for us to be reconciled with Him again. Christ became a *memai*, peace mediator,¹¹¹ and a sacrifice to restore peace between humanity and God.¹¹² He did not hold a *daarum* plant in His hand to symbolise peace, but His own precious blood. He did not slaughter pigs, or bring food, or use money, to restore peace, but He did it with His own body.¹¹³ If this concept is properly elucidated and contextualised, then the people will understand Christ's work of reconciliation, compensation, and redemption on the cross, for their rebellion and sins, so that they will no longer be God's enemies.

CULTURAL PRACTICE OF *FAILAI*¹¹⁴

The Kara-Nalik culture regards all first-born children as special. When these children reach a certain age they are baptised on special platforms, and bracelets of dog's teeth are tied on their wrists to signify their position as *failais*. They are accommodated and raised in specially-built houses. While there, they are taught the traditional wisdom and genealogies of the clan. They are people with authority.¹¹⁵

Christians, too, are God's special people. And, as cultural baptism symbolises a person to be a *failai*, Christians, too, have been baptised at the

¹⁰⁷ *Daarum* is the local name of a plant that only grows in coastal areas.

¹⁰⁸ *Tangop* is the Kara-Nalik term for traditional currency, which is made of sea shells.

¹⁰⁹ Pastor Roland Sarafai, of Luvaupul, interview by author, October 1, 2008.

¹¹⁰ See Gen 3:6-7; Rom 5:10-11; 1 Cor 15:21-22. Humanity is God's enemy, through the fall of Adam and Eve.

¹¹¹ See 1 Tim 2:5.

¹¹² See Eph 2:12-19; Col 1:20-22; 2 Cor 5:18-19.

¹¹³ See Heb 9:26.

¹¹⁴ *Failai* in the Kara-Nalik language means "the set-apart ones".

¹¹⁵ Gideon Piff, of Sali, interview by author, September 20, 2008.

foot of the Jesus' cross by His precious blood. Just like *failais* were taught traditional wisdom, and the genealogies of their people, Christians have been entrusted with God's Word. *Failais* have dogs' teeth tied to their wrists to mark their position, but Christians have the seal of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, as a mark of God's ownership of their entire lives.¹¹⁶ *Failais* live in specially-built houses, but Christians are the special houses of the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁷ In contextualising this, we Christians in Kara-Nalik are God's true *failais*.

When biblical concepts like these are contextualised with the cultural tenets of the people, they will truly understand the realities that God has always wanted them to know, and there will be spiritual growth in the churches. Also the Bible will become alive and meaningful, accepted and understood by the people.

ADVANCEMENT OF CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

Contextual theology is a very important and critical factor for the churches in Kara-Nalik to consider if they are to experience real transformation and church growth. The purpose of this section is to look at ways to advance this significant task.

BIBLE TRANSLATION, ADAPTATION, REVISION, AND GOSPEL RECORDING

Bible translation needs to be seriously considered by the churches in Kara-Nalik. Contextualising theology in this form will revolutionise the churches and communities for Christ. But, from experience, Bible translation is not easy. Contextualisation needs the support and encouragement of the church and community.

Translation of the Kara scripture took 18 years to complete. This is because the villagers were ignorant, and did not give good support to the translators. For Bible translation to happen, the indigenous people must fully participate, in order to produce a book that really speaks meaningfully

¹¹⁶ See 2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13; 4:30.

¹¹⁷ See 2 Cor 6:16; 1 Pet 2:4-5.

to them. A common response from many Kara speakers is a lack of understanding of their vernacular scripture. To prevent this problem from happening and keeping the people in the dark, translation work needs to be fully supported by all denominations, and the community. The local people should initiate Bible translation, and be mentored by missionaries.¹¹⁸ This does not mean that expatriates are not needed. We are partners, and we really need them. Their part is to assist us in translation principles, in grammatical and exegetical matters, and with other resources, such as computers and books.

The people of Nalik should see the importance of contextual theology, and must embark on adapting the already-translated Kara Bible into their language. Church and village leaders must set up a translation committee, and, with the support of SIL and the Bible Translation Association, carry out this noble task of contextualisation.

Contemporary culture, and language expressions, have really changed, causing difficulties for the younger generation in trying to understand old words, and other language expressions in the vernacular Bible. A resolution for this dilemma is to see that the vernacular Bible is revised for every generation. Another option, to help the young people, is to have two translations in one Bible.¹¹⁹ As mentioned in the previous section, the task of contextualisation is for everyone. The unchangeable Word of God has to be made relevant for every changing generation.

Contextual theology must also be advanced through recording the gospel on cassettes and videos, and distributing them to the people. The Gospel Recordings Network is an effective ministry that records gospel cassettes in different languages. It offers the gospel to those who are illiterate. This ministry has brought many people to a trust in God. The Kara-Nalik

¹¹⁸ The missionaries must allow the people to make their own decisions, and train the local people to do translation work. This will give local people ownership, and they can take pride in their own language.

¹¹⁹ This means a parallel Bible. The pages are to be divided into two columns with one having the words in vernacular and the other in English. This is purposely to help the young, who are not really familiar with their own languages. This method would also encourage them to learn and value their languages.

churches must consult such ministries, if they want to see spiritual changes and growth. Advancement of contextual theology means taking hold of every means of communication, and utilising them for the service of God. Some SIL-supported language groups have translated the “Jesus” film into their vernacular, which has been very successful.

LITERACY

An undeniable factor as to why the Kara people are not experiencing genuine life transformation, despite having the vernacular Bible, is because the people have difficulty reading their own language with understanding. The people can speak the language, but, when it comes to reading, they stumble, and are not fully feeding their spirits with God’s Word. And the reason they don’t enjoy God’s Word is because they are linguistically incapable. The Kara people are spiritually starving in the very midst of spiritual abundance.

Literacy classes are the only answer to this problem. Literacy needs to be established, and the people taught to read and write in their own language. If the translated Kara scripture is to be used for spiritual nourishment and church growth, then the church should ensure that literacy classes are held to educate and encourage the people to read and write, so they can benefit from the contextualised Word. If not, then the Bible, though opened, will always remain closed, and not give out its rich and precious contents to give true wisdom, direction, genuine conversion, and an ultimate life in the future. Literacy classes should be held for all the people in the village. Pastors and other church elders should take these literacy classes seriously, because they are the key people responsible for teaching God’s Word to the people in their language, and not in Pidgin and broken English.

Another effective means of promoting vernacular scriptures is through Scripture Application and Leadership Training (SALT). This is an intensive two-week course, conducted in the villages, where participants are required to use vernacular scriptures. Included in the training are fundamental biblical topics that need to be taught to the people. Group interaction, drama, and story-telling techniques are also applied. The whole

emphasis, throughout the course, is to help participants strengthen their relationship with the Lord, through the use of vernacular scriptures.¹²⁰

All cultural beliefs and practices must be learned, preserved, and utilised in God's service. Our stories, legends, myths, beliefs, and practices have something in them that will introduce us to the truths of God. Bad practices can be redeemed for God's glory.

Pastors, catechists, and other church leaders, must lead by example. They should preach and teach their people, in their own language and cultural forms, to fully expound God's Word to their people in different cultural forms of communication – understandable in their contexts. Adult literacy and vernacular preparation classes are seen as ways forward, for contextual theology to achieve its aim, and that is of God speaking to the people, in their own culture and language.

PRIME VENUES

In order for contextual theology to be advanced in this fast-changing culture of Kara-Nalik, strategic venues can be targeted, to educate and promote this task. This thesis suggests three strategic venues.

The first is the villages, because that is where the majority of the people live. The Kara-Nalik people are communal people. They love to sit together and learn from each other, as it is a core value in their culture. The village setting is best, because it will give the old people, who are immobile, the chance to learn. This will also save the people from travelling to outside training locations, which would be costly for them.

The second strategic venue is in the elementary and primary schools. A school is a good venue, because this is where young and fresh minds are eager and curious to learn new things. This is a place where we can instil the importance of our culture and language, and encourage these young people to value them. And, as the students are given religious instruction, they will also be educated on the importance of the task of

¹²⁰ Mick Bandy, "The SALT Project" (2004) [CD-ROM]; available from Summer Institute of Linguistics, Ukarumpa PNG.

contextualisation, and its value in the evangelisation of the gospel message in their local contexts. “This method was implemented in Daga elementary school in Milne Bay Province, and it was very successful.”¹²¹

And, thirdly, Bible schools provide an excellent training environment. It is understood that many different students from various cultures and sub-cultures live and study together, and this will be a very good place to advance the task of contextual theology on a larger scale. In the local Bible schools, students will be taught the importance of contextualisation – its principles, tasks, forms, and effects in the ministry of spreading the gospel, through teaching, preaching, and evangelisation to fulfil the Great Commission. As they graduate, they are then in a better position to practise contextualisation, when ministering the Word to the people.

And so, contextual theology really needs to be advanced, through the above-mentioned ways, and in the listed strategic venues, if it is to achieve its prime purpose of creating genuine understanding of God’s Word that will result in genuine spiritual growth, church growth, and transformation of society.

RELEVANCE OF CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

Contextual theology is a relevant and effective method of bringing about real spiritual knowledge and change in people’s lives. The purpose of this section is to look at the relevance and positive effects of contextualisation in promoting spiritual growth, and charting a new way forward for spiritual revival, church growth, and creating a safe and positive society.

INDIVIDUAL GROWTH

A general analysis of genuine spiritual conversion and development in Kara-Nalik reveals that there is no real spiritual growth. Nominalism is the norm in all the different denominations. The author has been to many evangelistic crusades, and has witnessed many people surrendering their

¹²¹ Caine Ruruk, student at Christian Leaders’ Training College, Banz PNG, interview by author, October 6, 2008. Prior to his coming to CLTC, Ruruk was the Literacy Consultant with the Bible Translation Association of Papua New Guinea.

lives to the Lord, but without commitment. Many have been living fake Christian lives. They have not truly understood what Christianity is about. And so, the only way to help them understand Christianity, is through contextualised theology in preaching, teaching, and evangelisation, in the people's language and culture. Contextual theology will truly produce genuine understanding, conviction, and spiritual growth.

The account in Acts 2:1-13 is a classic biblical example of the relevance of contextual theology. Individual lives, from every language and culture present at Pentecost, were touched as the apostles, under the unction of the Holy Spirit, presented God's Word.

The people of Telefolip, in Sandaun Province of PNG, were totally committed to their traditional religion, and hostile towards Christianity, because the *Am Ogen*¹²² was in their village. But, after a few years, every individual in that village forsook their animistic beliefs and practices, and believed in Christ. The cause of this dramatic change lies in God's Word being translated and taught to the people.¹²³ The people changed because they understood the Word. This is an example of the relevance of contextual theology.

When God's Word is properly contextualised into the language and understanding of the Kara-Nalik people, they will encounter the same experiences as the people in Paul's day, and as the Telefolip people. Contextual theology is so relevant for genuine spiritual growth.

If genuine spiritual growth is experienced in individual lives, the work of the church, in the various denominations, will also grow, because the church is comprised of individual Christians.

¹²² *Am Ogen* is a sacred spirit house, where hundreds of skulls of sacrificed pigs, and bags of ancestral bones, are kept. It is the centre for ancestral worship and witchcraft. Gabriel Kenny, student at Christian Leaders' Training College, Banz PNG, interview by author, July 29, 2008. Kenny is from Telefolip in Sandaun Province of PNG.

¹²³ Phyllis Healey, *What Do We Do Now?* (Kangaroo Ground Vic: Wycliffe Bible Translators Australia, 1992), p. 226.

CHURCH GROWTH

After 103 years of Christianity in Kara-Nalik, it is obvious that the church is not growing and functioning, by analysing its programs, administration work, church attendance, and the statistical figures of new converts. We can also see the church's lack of the training of qualified workers. We will take the United church as an example.

Ever since Christianity came, the United church has only trained and produced nine ministers¹²⁴ and 23 pastors.¹²⁵ Furthermore, another indication that the church is not growing is the fact that the same songs are repetitively sung for many years. In addition, many of these songs do not reflect sound theology, and this is a factor that is killing the church. Almost all the songs are sung in the Pidgin and English language, but the hymns are mainly sung in *Kuanua*.¹²⁶ All the songs, sung in foreign languages, do not truly speak to the heart of the people, or help them sing with meaning and praise to God.

It is strongly believed that, if the churches in Kara-Nalik are to experience growth, the songs should be contextualised into the local language with cultural tunes. Furthermore, new songs must be composed, using traditional instruments, to worship God.

Similarly, in East Sepik Province of PNG, Ken Nayau was burdened about his people of Manambu, because they were not reading their vernacular Bibles. To address this dilemma, Ken started an adult literacy class, and,

¹²⁴ Four have died, two now retired, and only three are still in active ministry.

¹²⁵ Revd Robinson Moses, of Munavai, interview by author (questionnaire), August 5, 2008. Revd Robinson is the current minister overseeing the Lakurumau circuit in the Kara-Nalik area.

¹²⁶ *Kuanua* is the language of the Tolai people of the Gazelle Peninsula in East New Britain Province. The early missionaries used the language as the main missionary language for evangelisation. It was used for instruction in schools, church liturgies, and in the faith. By the early 1980s, the language ceased to be a medium for instruction in New Ireland. Revd Dr William Longgar of Melanesian Institute of PNG, interview by author, October 13, 2008.

after 10 years of laborious work, he says, “The most important thing that has happened is church growth.”¹²⁷

The churches in Kara-Nalik can only grow if everybody is able to understand God’s Word. In order to achieve this, contextual theology must be elucidated and advanced. Ken, and the people of Manambu, experienced revival and church growth because of literacy work, and learning God’s Word in their own vernacular.

POSITIVE SOCIETY

Currently, life in Kara-Nalik is both biblically and culturally unethical. Revd Robinson laments; “Dark clouds of home brew, marijuana, teenage pregnancy, broken marriages, HIV/AIDS, religious apathy, and many more”¹²⁸ are prevalent in the society. Two others also shared the same sentiments with the author. They both said that disrespect, pornography, incest, and all kinds of immoral behaviour, are now taking their toll upon the communities, and the people are not at all ashamed of their behaviour.¹²⁹

The Kara-Nalik people are experiencing a tremendous challenge in their lives. All the unethical behaviours mentioned were once culturally condemned. Such acts as incest, and disrespect of parents and elders, were once not a common practice or part of the cultural standard of Kara-Nalik. Not only are these practices uncultural, they are also unbiblical.¹³⁰

The reason why these unethical practices are escalating, despite the fact that we have a record of 103 years of Christianity in the area, is because the people in the past, and now, have not been genuinely transformed by the Word. And the reason for this is highlighted throughout this thesis – the gospel was not properly and effectively communicated to the people, in

¹²⁷ Timothy Kwara, “A Vessel in the Master’s Hand”, in *In Our Words* (1986), p. 6.

¹²⁸ Refer footnote 125.

¹²⁹ Stanis Kasorot, of Lemakot, and Francis Laru, of Fangalava. Interviews by author through mobile phone, April 23, 2008.

¹³⁰ The Bible strongly condemns all such evils, as seen in 1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-21; Eph 5:5; Rev 22:15.

their cultural ways of understanding things, and in the world in which they live.

Consequently, for the Kara-Nalik society to experience real positive changes, the answer lies in contextualising theology. Christians really need to take careful consideration of the people's cultures and languages, and use them to pass on God's Word to their recipients. It is only in this way that people will truly come to experience the power of the Word, which will result in spiritual orientation, revival, and positive changes in the society.

The contextualised Word of God has the power to transform whole societies. As the Yesenmail people of the Sepik River, in PNG, said, "Now we sit well; now we live in peace."¹³¹ Agaribi further commented, "Having the Word of God in our language has not just transformed my people, but has caused a reformation of our whole society."¹³² That is the power and relevance of contextualisation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Christianity in Kara-Nalik needs rekindling, to come out of its long spiritual hibernation, to experience true spiritual vitality. Christians must now evaluate how the gospel message was presented, and then take serious consideration of the people's culture and languages. Following that, they can minister God's Word, using effective methods to reach the people.

The churches need to send more students to Bible schools for training. Bible translation, revision, and adaptation also need to be done. They could also invest in getting the gospel message to people, using cassettes or videos. Literacy work and SALT needs to be carried out in the Kara area, to help its people learn to read and write in their language, so they can really see the rich and eternal benefits of their language Bibles. The young people should value, and carefully analyse, their culture, and not see it as all demonic.

¹³¹ Kathy Russel, *Praise in Every Language*, Gweni Hurd, prod., 10 min, Ukarumpa PNG: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 2004, videocassette.

¹³² Ibid.

Church leaders from Kara-Nalik must conduct seminars, to teach their people the benefits of contextualisation, and books can be written to stress the importance of contextualisation.

CONCLUSION

Contextualised theology is urgently required for the churches in the Kara-Nalik area in New Ireland Province of PNG if they are to genuinely understand the content of the gospel message, which will then transform, enhance, and benefit their lives, now and in the future. Kara-Nalik culture is rapidly changing, just as other cultures are globally changing. Contextualisation is for the culture for every generation, with its one and only task of making the unchangeable, but life-changing, gospel message relevant to every generation, as long as God allows the earth to exist.

Contextualising should not be feared, but embraced, elucidated and advanced to cause spiritual growth in the local churches in Kara-Nalik. The onus is now on the people to actively make contextualisation a priority in all areas of their life.

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TOWARDS A CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY OF BLOOD, ANCESTORS, AND SPIRITS ON MANUS ISLAND

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INTRODUCTION

The initiative to effectively contextualise the gospel message into the Melanesian context¹ has been an ongoing concern for missionaries, pastors, and lay people, for the past decade. Many concerned writers have suggested ways on how best to communicate the gospel, hoping that the recipients would absorb the message² meaningfully in their own context, making Jesus Christ the object of their worship.

Ross Weymouth, in his class on contextualisation, challenged the students of the Christian Leaders' Training College (CLTC), by commenting, "How would you communicate biblical truth to people in Melanesia?"³ In an effort to convey the gospel into the Melanesian worldview, missionaries have placed the responsibility on Melanesian pastors to do proper contextualisation. With these challenges in mind, the author has wrestled to address certain cultural properties that are appropriate for presenting the gospel message. His desire is that the Ndranou people of Manus Island in PNG might be able to grasp the gospel in a way they can best understand.

¹ "Melanesian context" refers to how the gospel could be best presented to Melanesians, making Jesus Christ the object of their worship.

² The "message" is the salvation message of the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

³ Ross Weymouth, "Contextualisation" (class notes, Christian Leaders' Training College, Banz PNG, 2007), p. 18.

Thus, this paper will address the topic: “A legacy of cultural beliefs, as practised within Christianity. This paper presents a case study of *ndraii*⁴ and *mengndraii*,⁵ the effect of ancestral blood and spirits in relation to syncretism among the believers of the Ndranou local church, and the approach to synthesise biblical truth, to develop a contextualised theology.”

The first section will discuss contemporary cultural beliefs and practices; the second will demonstrate how this legacy has led to ethical and moral deficiency in the church; the third will present a biblical approach on the power of blood; while the fourth section will attempt contextualisation, and provide recommendations, before arriving at the conclusion.

A LEGACY OF CULTURAL BELIEFS, AS PRACTISED WITHIN CHRISTIANITY IN THE NDRANOU LOCAL CHURCH

The Melanesian concept of blood seems to be commonly understood in many cultures throughout Manus Province of PNG, in relation to beliefs, values, and practices, pursuant to their daily lives, and as well as their religious endeavour. This article will discuss the theory of blood, the effect of *ndraii* and *mengndraii*,⁶ as commonly believed and practised among the people of Ndranou, and other villages of the same mindset.⁷

CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

“What the people believed to be the absolutes, came from the powerful influence of culture and society, in which they lived and regarded as their

⁴ *Ndraii* means blood (literally, a red blood cell) in the *Akara* language. It can also mean a blood relative, immediate or extended family members, and, at times, it denotes physical infirmities, e.g., mental frailty.

⁵ *Mengndraii* is the effect of physical infirmity, by having contact with the immediate family's blood, or visiting traditional sites, where ancestors were killed, or even by breaching traditional taboos associated with bloodshed.

⁶ Dr Bernard Minol, lecturer at UPNG, questionnaire provided by author, June 13, 2008. “*Ndraii and mengndraii*”. Minol stated that *ndraii* is the word for blood in many Manus languages, and *mengndraii* is always related to physical, emotional, and psychological disease, associated with traditional beliefs on consanguinity, lineage, ancestry, descent, or blood groups.

⁷ Although this thesis confines itself to the Ndranou ECOM church, it will include practices of other local churches of ECOM, which are involved in such practices.

cultural norms.”⁸ From this cultural worldview, developed two fundamental values to be considered. The first is the perpetual relationship of maintaining the cultural bond of blood between extended and immediate families. The second is the cultural effect of ancestral blood and spirits, and the effects they have on family members, when their lives are brutally taken.

Ndranou Concept of ndrarii

The words *ndraii* and *mengndraii*, like any other language of communication, must be correctly understood from their cultural context.⁹ Although there is a slight difference in the meaning of the two words, in everyday conversation, the words are used interchangeably. Frequently, language speakers do not realise that, from time to time, they take short cuts during conversation, and thus, instead of *mengndraii*, many will shorten it to *ndraii*.¹⁰ Depending on its context, *ndraii* may represent literal blood, or it may be a figure of speech, with several meanings,¹¹ which include the following:

- It is a common word for blood in many Manus languages, and it literally means the red blood cells of animals and human beings, which contain life.
- It is often used to refer to someone with the same genealogy.¹²
- When used in a maxim, it usually refers to heredity. This means that if “a father is a cheater, a thief, or a womaniser, then his son will become the same”.¹³ It is also associated

⁸ Timothy Misha, “The Impact of the Middle Sepik River People’s Cultural Practices and Spirit-Worship on their Christian Worship”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 24-1 (2008), p. 44

⁹ A. M. Stibbs, *The Meaning of the Word Blood in Scripture* (London UK: Tyndale Press, 1954), p. 3.

¹⁰ Minol, questionnaire, June 13, 2008.

¹¹ Robert E. Coleman, *Written in Blood* (Old Tappan NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1972), pp. 6-7.

¹² Enoch Pondikou, Chief of Ndoyal clan, interview by author, July 4, 2008.

¹³ Misha, “The Impact of the Middle Sepik River People’s Cultural Practices and Spirit-Worship on their Christian Worship”, p. 46.

with traditional beliefs in consanguinity, lineage, ancestry, descent, or blood group, e.g., *su-ndaye pehna*.¹⁴

- It can be used to refer to a rainbow, accompanied by little rain. Here it is known as *ndraii*, *mwalau eh yongyong*, which has the undertone of a bad omen. During this time of *ndraii*, it is believed that *piyit*¹⁵ roam around in villages, roads, rivers, and gardens. Children and adults are, therefore, required to remain in their homes, and not wander around, lest they be mercilessly attacked by the *piyit*.
- It may also mean skin diseases, or other forms of illness, be they physical, emotional, or psychological. However, if it is related to blood, it is definitely acknowledged as *mengndraii*.

Ndranou Concept of mengndraii

Consequently, while *ndraii* is referred to as a blood relative, or is used in figures of speech, *mengndraii* is considered to be appalling, and associated with deceased people's spirits.¹⁶ The word *mengndraii* is a combination of two words: *meng* (adj), (the Nali equivalent is *mang*), and it literally means "dried up", and *ndraii* is blood, and, thus, we could summarise it as "dead blood".¹⁷ Although *mengndraii* may be defined as dead blood, yet, within the framework of people's thinking, this blood is still considered active in

¹⁴ *Su-ndaye pehna* means they have inherited a character trait of perpetual thieving, which may be expressed in Melanesian Pidgin and Akara language as *ol wampela kain blut olsem*, or *su ndraii hapat*.

¹⁵ *Piyit* is a Ndranou word for an evil spirit that haunts people, and prevents them from living ordinary lives. It is very dangerous for a person to wander around during *ndraii*, *mwalau eh yongyong*, because a *piyit* will filch away a human spirit, leaving the person to die.

¹⁶ Maria Nambruhut Pokowos, of Ndranou village, interview by author, July 3, 2008. She is an elderly woman in her 90s, who elaborated that *ndraii* simply means blood relatives, while *mengndraii* is considered very bad. It is an evil spirit of bloodshed, which brings about physical, emotional, or psychological disease.

¹⁷ Minol, questionnaire, June 13, 2008.

these areas. From the author's sources, *mengndraii* has been described by certain intellectual elite¹⁸ of Ndranou as:

- A recipient under a curse. When someone is murdered, and his blood is found at a specific area of a river or small creek, the exact site is contaminated with a curse and diseases. Any relative, who bathes in that water, will most likely become a victim of what is termed as *mengndraii*, in the form of skin disease, loss of eyesight, mental illness, or epilepsy.
- Kaspou stated: "*mengndraii* is spilled blood, caused in many situations. An example of a cold-blooded murder relates to spilled blood that can easily possess any spirit, and advance its power to lure living souls. In many situations, the consequences of *mengndraii* are mental illness, and skin diseases."¹⁹
- The word *mengndraii* means "the manifestation of physical infirmities, experienced by having contact with blood, or trespassing over certain sacred sites and places, where spirit powers, associated with bloodshed, are accessible". Occasionally, it has reference to the ancestral spirits, who are responsible for passing on sickness, and other physical infirmities. Bartle describes these spirits as "the remembered dead, also sometimes referred to as the living dead, are ever present among the living, and . . . are part of the clan".²⁰

¹⁸ The author wishes to acknowledge the following people for their helpful assistance on this subject: Paul Kaspou, of Timoh tribe, Enoch Pondikou, of Ndoyal tribe, and Luke Pondikou, senior pastor of the Ndranou local church, ECOM. All come from the Ndranou village, and are familiar with these beliefs.

¹⁹ Pastor Paul Kaspou, of Lorengau Town church, interview by author, July 4, 2008.

²⁰ Bartle, *Death Witchcraft, and the Spirit World in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea*, Point 29 (2005), p. 42.

Finally, while the author has attempted to discover the symptoms of *mengndraii*, and how its effect is seen on those affected, the word basically means “evil spirit of bloodshed”.²¹ However, this belief does not sound plausible, according to medical science. Blood can cause sickness, only if it is infected with viruses, such as HIV, or hepatitis B. The symptoms of hepatitis B are changes in eye colour, and skin diseases. Fresh blood cannot cause sickness, unless contaminated by germs or viruses. Mental illnesses, loss of eyesight, and skin diseases have nothing to do with ancestral blood, or the spirits of those who died long ago. People become mentally ill due to mental stress, or too much worry.²²

The Western worldview, which is based on facts, scientific proofs, and reasoning, would find this phenomenon to be unrealistic, but sicknesses, diagnosed as epilepsy or pneumonia, may be understood totally differently, from an animistic worldview.²³ It may sound unrealistic, but, in some sense, it is true. Experiences among some families in Manus have shown that medical science has failed to diagnose certain people, who were known to be seriously ill. These people were often sent home with a diagnosis of *sik b'long ples*.²⁴ This approach definitely confirms the cultural beliefs to be true. Demonic powers must be acknowledged as real, and, those who become involved with them, are likely to allow these powers to manifest in their lives.

The gospel writers eloquently demonstrate throughout Jesus' ministry that He encountered people who were affected, both with natural sickness, and demon possession. Therefore, a balanced assessment of the nature of the sickness is required, to determine its cause.

²¹ Maria Nambruhut Pokowos, of Ndranou village, interview by author, July 4, 2008.

²² Wanure Susuke, Health Extension Officer of CLTC, Banz PNG, interview by author, September 16, 2008.

²³ David Burnett, *World of the Spirits* (London UK: Monarch Books, 2000), p. 46.

²⁴ When a person is diagnosed with *sik b'long ples*, it may mean sickness from personal sin or sorcery. This approach definitely confirms the cultural beliefs to be true.

NDRAII AS FAMILY GENEALOGY

The concept of both *ndraii* and *mengndraii* was discussed in the previous section. How a relationship of *ndraii* is maintained will now be examined, and its consequences, if it is not safeguarded. It will also describe *nurr heng-hang*,²⁵ and how it is related to *ndraii*, from a cultural context.

Building Relationships

Historically, the cultural structure of maintaining relationships between the immediate and extended family members has been practised for many years, and is of great significance. Building relationships involves social activities, economic beneficiaries, and customary obligations, at times of death, marriage, and participation in land matters, and so on. This is one of the Melanesian cultural assets, which families of all ethnic groups continue to enjoy.

It is acknowledged as morally and socially excellent to relate well to families in activities, when there is a matter of family urgency. People are well versed in their genealogical lineage, and intermarriages between clans and villages, and that is how they build relationships, and relate on that established lineage. From this continuous family union, children tend to know their families, those close to them, and those living in other villages, and abroad. Parents frequently recite their genealogical lineage to their children, with many able to eagerly trace their family lines as far as 30 generations back. Kaspou commented that “*ndraii* connects family members together, and speaks of tribal and family solidarity, wealth, and power”.²⁶

In the event of customary commitments, such as bride-price and death, members of the family are expected to attend to show grief, or affection, for a specific member of the family. This manner of cultural practices promotes security, love for each other, respect, and unity. This affiliation not only applies to cultural obligations, but also to daily activities, like paying relatives a visit to chat, or spend time to help in ways that

²⁵ *Nurr heng-hang* means child adoption into a family or tribe.

²⁶ Kaspou, interview, July 4, 2008.

strengthen the family relationships.²⁷ Anyone who disassociates himself or herself only creates a gap between themselves and the rest of the extended family members.

Furthermore, from a cultural perspective, it is strictly forbidden to marry a member of the same family, or next of kin, since they are blood relatives. To maintain the relationship, one has to marry elsewhere, rather than within the group. Family members are highly valued, and efforts are made to preserve that relationship. People demonstrate love and respect by not getting married to family members.

Such practices are contradictory to those of the patriarchs of Israel, where marriage was confined to within one's own family and kindred.²⁸ Marriage to people of heathen nations was strictly forbidden. Israel, as God's chosen nation, was to have nothing to do with idolatrous and impure nations, for fear that they might be enticed into idolatry.²⁹ From the Manusian cultural judgment, the marriage of Jacob, the son of Rebecca, to Leah and Rachael is regarded as very wrong. Such action would destroy their relationships, and would mean their support would come to an end.

Consequences of not Maintaining Relationships

To be excluded from the family attachments may sometimes put a particular person in a hazardous situation. For Melanesians, social, economic, and political dependency is highly esteemed, and whoever deliberately decides to leave the family will feel a sense of guilt. On the other hand, as Minol explains, "other members of the family will resent the one who has isolated himself or herself from the family. The seriousness of this will impact on ownership of land, land rights, and land use, and the

²⁷ Enoch Pondikou, interview by author, July 4, 2008. Melanesians are people-oriented, and time and effort is given to maintaining continuation of their family relationships. Family members are seen as valuable resources in times of difficulties, and they are there to provide help, protection, and guidance.

²⁸ Gen 24:4; Judg 14:3.

²⁹ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on Judges 14:3*, e-Sword – the Sword of the LORD with an electronic edge, computer software.

right to use fruit-bearing trees.”³⁰ Such a person is short-sighted, and may bring harm to his children.

In the event of death, where a bride-price or a daughter is being given in marriage, and the attendance of all family members is required, none will come, since the expression “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” is the current Melanesian status quo of reciprocity. The common identity label on such people is “*mbrukei yii*” or “*nurr yohang*”.³¹ Salvation in Melanesia is accumulated in this manner.

Likewise, the book of Hebrews earnestly exhorts Christians to continually meet with each other, for their spiritual enrichment.³² It is evident that, when the horizontal relationship with each other is not maintained, this indicates that the vertical relationship with God definitely has been damaged. What would happen if a Christian constantly fails to show up for fellowship? Would he not suffer spiritual decadence? Therefore, it is crucial to uphold relationships between family members, lest they grow cold in their Christian faith. Christianity is all about relationship building. Dedicated Christians will always maintain their relationships with God and the church collectively. Believers are challenged by the Lord to continually abide in Him, in order to be fruitful. Apart from Him, Christians can do nothing (John 15:1-8).

Nurr heng-hang as ndraii

The phrase “*nurr heng-hang as ndraii*” is equivalent to, or has the idea of, the New Testament (NT) theology of “in-grafted branches of wild olive into the olive tree”.³³ Literally it means adopting someone into a biological family, and giving that person the same privileges as any other member.³⁴ Cultural adoption has been practised by three groups of Manus – the Titans,

³⁰ Minol, questionnaire, June 13, 2008.

³¹ Luke Koitut, of ECOM High School, interview by author, July 1, 2008. He commented that such people who isolate themselves are given the name *mbrukei-yii*, or *nurr yohang*, which means “to be of no use, and unproductive in the family unit”.

³² Heb 10:24-25.

³³ Rom 11:11-24.

³⁴ Rom 8:12-24; Gal 4:4-6; John 1:12-13.

Matangkor, and Wusiai people. However, in the context of the Ndranou people, there are two philosophies being practised.

One is adopting someone from the wife's family, or the wife's child from a former marriage. The husband of the wife is then responsible to show love and kindness to the adopted child, as his biological offspring. Naturally, members of the tribe also regard the adopted child as part of their family.

Another approach to adoption is where the husband embraces a member of his own family, usually his sister's son, who was born without a legitimate father. The son is raised to adulthood, and remains a member of his adopted family.

Moreover, in this discussion, as a point of concern to theology, the author presents the historic, rare case of adoption of Ponumbrut into the Wayii clan. Geographically, Ponumbrut comes from a locality known as Nombrut, about 30 kilometres north-east of Manus, along the seacoast. Because of internal family rivalry with his brothers, he clothed himself in his traditional costume, put some ferns and a piece of sharp bamboo into his armband, and left home. The ferns and the sharp bamboo are a cultural symbol signifying that the person is selling himself to any tribe he comes across, to be killed and eaten.

Ponumbrut was a walking dead man, and his salvation depended on anyone who found him. Wayii, a member of Ndrokukuu tribe, did so, and had sympathy for him. He adopted Ponumbrut as his first biological offspring, and legitimately accepted him as a member of the tribe. He was given land to cultivate to begin a new life, and he shared the same legal rights as any member of the clansmen. His biological families were never mentioned, or made known, to his new clan members. He began a new life, forgetting the past, and looking forward to the future.

The only thing that is commonly done by an adopted person is that, when he prospers, in terms of having children and gaining prominence, he would

give away some of his wealth. This can be done by giving dogs' teeth,³⁵ taro, and pigs, as presents to the clansmen, as a token of his thanksgiving. Ponumbrut was, in a sense, dead, but, because of the grace of the Ndrokukuu tribe, he now lives on.

From this narrative, use can be made of concepts that resemble the biblical teachings of death, grace, redemption, salvation, sonship, and thanksgiving. It is the author's theory that, if this narrative is properly understood, from the cultural context, it will definitely shed light on the present biblical adoption through faith, accomplished in Jesus Christ. Believers will then know with certainty that their adoption has given them ultimate rights to be beneficiaries of God's inheritance.³⁶

MENGNDRAII OF THE ANCESTORS

Human blood is regarded as mystical and powerful in nature. It is mostly feared among the local people. Where an ancestor, or a member of a family, loses his life in a dreadful manner, for example, by an enemy village and cannibalised at a certain geographical location, this area is then regarded as sacred, and strictly out of bounds to other family members. It is believed that people, who go near this place, might experience physical infirmities. It is perceived that, should a surprise announcement be made in an audible voice, which says, *papum su tayii irr akara*,³⁷ some form of physical illness will naturally result. This theory will be explained in the following two case studies.

³⁵ Dogs' teeth are known as the traditional money by the Manus people. It is believed that the origin of dog's teeth is from Konga, an unknown island, somewhere near Japan. It might be Tonga.

³⁶ John 1:12; Rom 8:5; Eph 1:3-13.

³⁷ *Papum su tayii irr akara* means "your ancestors were killed or murdered at that spot". It is culturally forbidden to unexpectedly make an announcement within the location of the deceased person.

The Mode of Acquiring mengdraii – Case Study 1

Eunice³⁸ is the daughter of a missionary teacher from Ndranou, who worked for some time in the Nindou circuit. She was a genuine believer in Christ, and her involvement with the youth was quite pleasant. In 1999, her father suffered an illness, and was admitted to a nearby health centre. She accompanied her father to care for him.

Within the health centre locality, some of their ancestors had been killed and cannibalised. Her father, for some unknown reason, made a surprise announcement, telling her, “stay near to me, and don’t move the beds around. Every bed and area in the hospital is not good.” In her own words, she said, “*Dispela tok tasol na blut b’long tumbuna b’long yumi i stap long haus sik i kalap long pes b’long mi.*”³⁹ A month later, after leaving the health centre, Eunice suffered a rash on her entire face. It turned black, and small painful sores began to develop on it.

It is surprising that this belief is not confined only to the Ndranou village, but is practised in other areas of Manus,⁴⁰ and the country also. Among the *Yonggom* people of Western Province in PNG, human blood is also regarded as powerful. Yandit affirms that people believe in its sacredness and mystical powers, and that an ancestor’s spirit is the cause. People, who touch the body of a dead person, and eat, without washing their hands, are likely to lose all their teeth.⁴¹

Blood sacrifice has never been practised by the Ndranou people. However, the Kobon people of the Enga Province, and the people of the Simbu Province, both in PNG, continue to offer blood sacrifices to restore

³⁸ This is a fictitious name to keep private the original identity of the person. The people mentioned are still alive, and the author is related to them.

³⁹ Dorcas Puahau, a student of CLTC Port Moresby Centre PNG, questionnaire provided by the author, June 11, 2008.

⁴⁰ The author interviewed people from other parts of Manus Province during 2002-2006, and found this belief to be common among the people of Loniu in the Los Negros Constituency, the people of Worei in the Tetidu Constituency, and Nindou Circuit, on the west coast of Manus.

⁴¹ Kirine Yandit of CLTC, Banz PNG, questionnaire provided by the author, August 23, 2008.

relationships with the spiritual realm. The concept and understanding of blood sacrifice is widespread throughout all Melanesian cultures. It is, therefore, easy for Papua New Guineans to understand the concept of Jesus' death, and His blood being shed, in order to reconcile us to God.⁴²

The Mode of Repelling mengndraii

Eunice's mother informed her that it was *mengndraii*, and she needed to see Simon.⁴³ She visited him, and was instructed to meet with him again at the new moon. On that special date, she was given the liquid from a plant to drink. After that, she went to the river and swam downstream, from the top and back again, twice. She did exactly as she was instructed to do. Later, Simon referred her to another healer to perform the ritual to cast out the spirit of the ancestor.

Firstly, Eunice was required to provide the names of those killed within the vicinity of the health centre. Having established that, she returned to the local healer for ritual purposes. Every morning and evening at six o'clock, for a period of five days, the healer chewed betel nuts, chanted over his powers, and called the ancestral spirits to go out of Eunice, and not to harm her any more. After this session of rituals, Eunice received her healing. The exorcism did not reflect any biblical likeness, or mention God's name for help, yet Eunice received her healing, so to speak. The underlying discussion here is related to the superiority and power of the blood of Jesus over that of ancestral blood. She admitted that Christ's blood is powerful, but also decided to consult a magician for physical cleansing.

⁴² Bartle, *Death, Witchcraft, and the Spirit World*, p. 163

⁴³ Pastor Hubert Pokowos, of Ndranou, interview by author, July 4, 2008. Simon is an elderly member, and a leader, of Ndranou local church. It is secretly rumoured among Christians and village people that he seems to cling to certain traditional healing charms, and the power to see into the spirit world. Simon is a fictitious name obtained from Simon of Acts 8.

Another Christian Phenomenon – Case Study 2

Sylvester and Belinda⁴⁴ were members of Ndranou local youth group in the Evangelical Church of Manus (ECOM). In 1996, a revival broke out there, as a result of much prayer and hunger for God’s Word. The church then went into a period of turmoil of disunity over a doctrinal issue. Some members remained, while others felt God’s Spirit was leading them to find new pastures of spontaneous fellowship. This couple also left the church.

Some years later, their younger son went to bathe in a creek adjacent to one of their family member’s homes. A few metres down the creek, one of his father’s ancestors was killed by an enemy there. After bathing, a rash developed on the son’s face. He was taken to the hospital for medication, but it seemed to be of no help. The boy slept with his grandfather Simon,⁴⁵ and Simon noticed that it was *mengndraii*. They suspected this sickness to be related to the ancestor’s blood, and so the grandfather, who is known to be a Christian, referred him to the local healer, previously mentioned in case study 1.⁴⁶ It is not known if the son drank from the juice of a special plant from his grandfather, and bathed in the stream, but it is customary to provide names of the dead ancestor for the local healer to perform rituals to prevent the ancestral spirit from doing further harm.

The puzzling question is, “Why should Melanesian Christians deviate from biblical truth to seek other powers for deliverance, rather than relying on God for spiritual and physical assistance?” Or, the question could be asked, “Why do parents remain ignorant and reluctant about their children’s spiritual welfare?” From the two case studies, it may be asked as to why people, who profess to be in full-time Christian ministry, continue to possess magical healing charms? Why do Christians seek such power for deliverance, when they are supposed to rely totally on God?

⁴⁴ The names are, again, fictitious. They were members of the ECOM, but felt God calling them to fellowship with another church. They regarded ECOM as spiritually dead, and wished to find a spontaneous fellowship.

⁴⁵ Simon is the same person in case study one. The phrase “and he noticed” refers to seeing in an ordinary dream, or, in this context, it had reference to spiritual power, to see into the spirit realm, though in a dream.

⁴⁶ Samson Ananias, of Lorengau, interview by author, July 1, 2008.

A MODEL OF ETHICAL AND MORAL DEFICIENCY IN THE CHURCH

In the previous section, the general idea of *ndraii* and *mengndraii* was described. This section will, therefore, explore how these situations are seen as evidence, from such case studies, leading to ethical and moral deficiency in the church. A glimpse into the background of these phenomena is essential before beginning to explore spiritual decadence in the church.

Historically, it has been accepted as cultural practice among the people that those affected by *mengndraii* would always consult a specialist.⁴⁷ That is, the traditional method is employed as the only cure to *mengndraii*, and other related diseases. The specialist would then perform an exorcism to appease the ancestor's spirit, or other powers encountered, and persuade them to leave the victim, who would then be healed.⁴⁸ It has been understood, from the cultural worldview, that these specialists have the power to fend off sicknesses, and bring good health.

The author has observed that a few believers, who suffered sickness, were referred to a specialist, when medication and prayers from Christians seemed to be of no effect.⁴⁹ The specialist would sometimes bring healing to their patient, and sometimes not. Where the healing did not work well, the end result was death. These case studies are representative of many recorded episodes of biblical nominalism and syncretistic endeavour, disobeying biblical principles. This seems to be a common problem, experienced in many contemporary Melanesian churches.

Syncretism

The term "syncretism" is a word that derives from 1st-century Christianity, and it "involves the dividing of one's allegiance between God and some

⁴⁷ Specialists are people, who possess certain powers, specifically for repelling *mengndraii* from another person. From the author's knowledge, there is a certain Christian, who is now currently chairman of a nearby local church, and who continues to cling to this power.

⁴⁸ Puahau, questionnaire, June 11, 2008.

⁴⁹ The author has seen Christians, who have fallen away from their faith, after being affected by such sickness. It seems to be a regular occurrence in many churches of Papua New Guinea.

other entity . . . the union of opposite beliefs and systems, so that differences are either reconciled, or held in tension, creating a new religious form”.⁵⁰ This is one of the most widespread problems practised by numerous Christians in contemporary Melanesian churches.

It is “the replacement and dilution of the essential truths of the gospel, through the incorporation of non-Christian elements”.⁵¹ While this statement is undeniable, Kewai describes syncretism as the influential result of the Melanesian worldview.⁵² When the missionaries first landed on Melanesian soil, animistic beliefs and practices were very evident. Today, however, these beliefs are not quite so obvious, but many Christians attempt to combine their faith with these former beliefs.

However, it is the author’s judgment that, although the Melanesian worldview may have contributed to the rise of syncretism, Christianity has shed light on Melanesian people for almost 100 years.⁵³ It has refined cloudy thoughts, by discerning darkness from light, error from truth, and the power of Satan from God. To live a syncretistic lifestyle definitely means living in hostility towards the righteous God,⁵⁴ and indicates a nominal Christian life.

Furthermore, with the introduction of educational systems into villages and neighbouring towns, children learn things at an early stage of their lives that they have never thought of before. Children learn proper counting systems, good hygiene, social skills, and about the world around them.

⁵⁰ Wayne Kendi, “The Doctrine of Justification: the Remedy to the Ills of the Melanesian Church”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 21-2 (2005), pp. 82-83.

⁵¹ “Syncretism”, in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Walter A. Elwell, ed. (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 2001), pp. 1158-1161.

⁵² Kero Kewai, “Nominalism in PNG”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 14-1 (1998), pp. 40-52.

⁵³ The pioneer missionaries came from the Leibenzell Mission International, and landed on Manus soil on July 16, 1914. The church developed from this missionary movement into what is called today the Evangelical Church of Manus. In 2014, it will celebrate 100 years of religious endeavour in the country.

⁵⁴ Ex 20:3; Gen 16:12; 25:18.

Education gives them the ability to develop good reasoning, and choose to live more decent lifestyles.

An additional factor can be attributed to the influence of modern technology in the churches, the villages, and the country at large. People, who are mentioned in these case studies, are not primitive, for most of them are exposed to modern influences. It is the author's assumption that those involved in such activities lack biblical knowledge on related matters. It is, therefore, required that believers be taught more about the dangers of being involved in such practices.

Nominalism

The word "nominalism" is given to followers of the Christian faith, who profess to be Christians, but, in reality, deny God by their deeds (Titus 1:16). Nominal Christians eagerly participate in Christian activities, as an outward expression of demonstrating their faith, but, inwardly, there is no desire and yearning to live up to the demands of the Christian faith. It is clear that, throughout their lives, they have been living hypocritically. Having worked for five years in pastoral ministry, the author has identified that such people cannot be found in one particular church only, but can be found across many churches in the ECOM.

The author vividly recalls an experience in 2005, during a Sunday service in one of the local churches, when the church chairman repented from his life of clinging to a magical charm. In his own words, he said, "*Dispela samting i bin holim mi pas 20 years olgeta na mi nogat fridom long worshipim God.*"⁵⁵ What he implied was that, for 20 years, he had been living in hypocrisy, an actor without a guilty conscience. Such an

⁵⁵ This incident happened during a Sunday service, when a trainee pastor preached, and the chairman of the local church cried and repented from his life of clinging to a magical charm. The author prayed for this man, and poured the content of his charm into water. The colour was a coral lime, and the author assumes it was used to attract women. The author later interviewed this man about what the magical charm was used for, but he was vague over this issue.

experience seems to be a common practice among some church members, thus giving the ECOM a bad reputation.⁵⁶

Powers Versus Doctrine

It is surprising to detect from this hypothesis the struggles between the theories of power encounter and the premise of correct doctrine. People are easily deceived by a power display, rather than focusing on the right teachings. As long as it works well for them, they are in favour of it.

Let us have a quick glance on the later part of the life of King Saul, when he was confronted to fight the Philistines at Gilboa (1 Sam 28:3-6). Israel had recently lost their prophet, and Saul trembled, when he found out that God could not give him any new revelation. He then made a wrong move, by consulting mediums that he had previously put out of the land. He knew that what he was doing was wrong, but, nonetheless, decided to do it.

Melanesians also tend to shift more easily to power encounters, rather than focusing on what is right or wrong.⁵⁷ Such concern is automatically ignored when it comes to cases as *mengndraii*, and other related sicknesses.⁵⁸ People tend to do away with the correct teaching, and embrace human tradition, for instant power healing, and later return to Christian practices after being cured.⁵⁹ The author assumes that probably

⁵⁶ Gideon Kasou, of Manus, questionnaire provided by the author, July 15, 2008. Gideon, the Church's Agency Health Secretary, is from Lessau on the west coast of Manus, and comments that the Nindou circuit had similar problems, because of practices by certain people in the church.

⁵⁷ Theodoor Ahrens, "Concepts of Power in a Melanesian and Biblical Perspective", in *Christ in Melanesia: Exploring Theological Issues Point 1&2* (1977), pp. 61-63.

⁵⁸ Lewis B. Smedes, *Mere Morality* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 1-2. From the author's questionnaires, and interviews with people affected, it appears they knew what they were doing was wrong, but did not feel guilt, because they looked forward to being cured. The thought of, "Is what I am doing right?" was eliminated from their minds.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 2. The idea of moral right or wrong is absent, but the impression people give is that they have lost track of God's will, and are holding fast to the tradition of men (Mark 7:8). The Apostle Paul asked the Colossian believers, "Why do you submit to regulations, human precepts, and doctrines?" (Col 2:20,22).

Melanesians believe in many different spirits and gods, but ascribe their allegiance to their own, when problems are encountered.⁶⁰

Here is another scenario that will support this argument. A believer of a local church, with whom the author is familiar, got an abscess just beneath his chin. As the abscess grew, it became painful and probably tightened the neck muscles, so that he could not converse properly.⁶¹ With similar cases like, this experienced in the past, the locals immediately deduced that such sickness came as a result of sorcery. Consequently, fear took control of him, and, without proper thinking, he began to seek help from other sources, rather than consulting Christians.⁶² He sensed that death was near, and, without delay, went to a local healer to be cured.

Van Rheenen states that “the principalities and powers, opposed to God work in various ways to alienate people from God. They use gods, which are not gods, so that people would believe and worship them.”⁶³ In situations like this, God allows these things to happen, to show whether we are able to stand the test, or give in, because of fear, or other reasons. The attitudes of careful analysis, consulting scripture, or receiving advice from pastors and lay people, are neglected. People deliberately become ignorant of the authority of scripture, and yield to Satan’s power. Some Christians still deliberately consult witchdoctors for healing, after feeling that medication is of no help.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Doug Hanson, “Exodus” (class notes, Banz PNG: Christian Leaders’ Training College, 2008), p. 35.

⁶¹ Kahou Kolkol, of Ndranou, interview by author, July 5, 2008. The author obtained first-hand information from Kolkol, a close associate of the believer, who had sympathy for him, and led him to his in-law to be cured. The believer slept with the local healer for five days, who would perform rituals every morning and evening to prevent the sorcery from doing further harm.

⁶² Such people, who deviate from their faith are none other than what the scripture calls “idolaters”. They have no inheritance in heaven, no matter how hard they try. They are unacceptable in God’s sight (Eph 5:5).

⁶³ Gailyn van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* (Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1991), p. 101.

⁶⁴ Identity not disclosed, interview by author, August 2, 2008. A believer, while at the local Bible School in Manus, happened to contact some form of illness. Medication seemed to be of no help, and so he made his way to a local sorcerer to be cured. The author asked him if

Destroyer of the Church

The church of Ndranou, under the banner of ECOM, has experienced spiritual decline and challenges, after a crusade launched in 1996. The church then disintegrated over minor non-theological issues, and attempts to bring up the zeal for commitment to church worship and other activities have been a failure. As the ministry of the church clashes against the swelling tide of daily lives, the remnant, mostly widows, and other female members, continues to shine like stars in the universe.⁶⁵

The author sympathetically acknowledges their religious endeavour, and takes pride in their commitment. However, he ponders about what could be the real cause of the spiritual decline. Apart from rival denominational territorial expansion and interest, it is the author's assumption that those who consult sorcerers, and keep magical charms, or practise sorcery among the weaker members of a congregation, contribute to the destruction of the church of God.

Pondikou admitted that, in his pastoral ministry, he knows of certain people, who possess healing charms, and yet hold positions of leadership in the church. They are the people, who are very likely to hinder the church worship.⁶⁶ Such people are destructive elements to the growth of the church, and must be warned of their evil deeds.⁶⁷ King Saul lost his legacy as king of Israel, because of his unfaithfulness to God, by consulting a witch for help. Judah was deported to Babylon, because of idolatry. The church of Ndranou could also suffer spiritual decline, even if only one

what he was doing was wrong. His response was positive; however, since the situation was getting out of hand, he thought of looking for some instant healing that would relieve him from pain, fear, and death.

⁶⁵ Phil 2:12-16.

⁶⁶ Pastor Luke Pondikou, of Ndranou, interview by author, July 2, 2008.

⁶⁷ A careful study of the Bible helps us to understand that these practices were committed by believers throughout the Old and New Testaments. God prohibits such practices, yet, among them, certain believers would deviate from their faith, and become involved in them.

person is involved in such practices, because the scriptures clearly prohibit such involvement.⁶⁸

When the Israelites began to occupy the Promised Land, God consistently warned them to have nothing to do with these heathen practices.⁶⁹ “Let no one be found among you who practises divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium, or a spiritist, or who consults the dead” (Deut 18:9-14). It is detestable before God. Those who practise such things surely have joined hands with demons.

Studies have shown that Melanesian cultural influences have been the driving forces behind syncretism, and, therefore, hinder the full participation of believers in their faith. They tend to shift more freely to animistic powers, rather than focusing on the right ethical principles, alienating themselves from the presence of God. The book of Colossians says that all creation in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, powers, and authorities, were created by Him, and for Him, and so, they are subject to Christ’s sovereignty.⁷⁰ Thus, the next section looks forward to bringing together all things under the lordship of Christ.

THE BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE POWER OF BLOOD

The Old Testament (OT) defines blood as the life principle of both animals (Lev 17:11) and plants (Deut 32:14). It was used in religious rites throughout the scriptures, and seems to denote several aspects of man’s religious endeavour. The theology of blood is extensive, and so this section will be confined to how blood is understood in the Jewish mindset, is used in figures of speech, in ceremonial cleansing, and in the redemptive work of Christ.

⁶⁸ Maria Sion, of Ndranou village, interview by author, July 4, 2008. She commented that, just like when Achan hid certain things in his tent when Israel went to war with the Midianites and suffered loss, so, too, the church will experience spiritual decline, even if one person continues to be involved in sorcery, divination, witchcraft, and magic.

⁶⁹ “Do not turn to mediums or seek out spirits, for you will be defiled by them. I am the Lord your God” (Lev 19:31).

⁷⁰ Col 1:15-20.

Jewish Understanding of Blood

Blood was recognised by the Hebrews as the red fluid that circulates in human veins and arteries, and the breathing system. They had an understanding of how it was used. When Joseph was sold by his brothers to an Egyptian merchant, they sprinkled animal blood on his coat, and showed it to Jacob. The sight of the blood made Jacob say: “An evil beast hath devoured him.”⁷¹ When blood pours out of the body in a large quantity, it leaves the body in a helpless state. It clearly means that life has been taken away. And so, blood came to be understood as a word symbol for brutal or violent death.⁷²

Figurative Usage

The Jews also used blood metaphorically, to denote pictures or thought forms to communicate certain features of life. A person, who deliberately took away someone’s life, was said to have upon him the blood of the person he had killed. Even Jews of the NT forced Pilate to release Jesus to be crucified, claiming his blood would be upon them and their children. They were willing to be responsible for the death of Jesus, and, without realising it, were inviting God’s curse upon themselves, and to their third and fourth generations.⁷³ And since a murderer deserves punishment, a person who retaliates to inflict a penalty was said to be avenging the murdered man’s blood.⁷⁴ Such metaphorical phraseology must be of some significance to Bible students in interpreting NT statements like: “They washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the lamb”, or “we plead the blood of Jesus to cover us”, or “we claim Christ’s blood to seal the four corners of this building”.⁷⁵ These are word symbols, which have

⁷¹ Gen 37:31-33.

⁷² Stibbs, *The Meaning of the Word Blood in the Scripture* (London UK: Tyndale Press, 1947), p. 10.

⁷³ H. L. Ellison, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, A New Testament Commentary, G. C. D. Howley, F. F. Bruce, and H. L. Ellison, eds (London UK: Pickering & Inglis, 1969), p. 173.

⁷⁴ Ps 8:2. That is, the person who inflicts punishment upon the evildoer for a wrong experienced by himself.

⁷⁵ Yandit, interview, May 20, 2008.

reference to someone's brutal death, and involve other people with the consequences of it.⁷⁶

Used For Purification Purposes

The atoning power of blood, in OT sacrifices, foreshadows that of the future atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁷⁷ "The term blood, in fact, had references to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, particularly in the contexts, which define its efficacy."⁷⁸ In the OT, blood is used generally in a number of ways. It is, firstly, used in general terms, and, secondly, applied in religious language.⁷⁹

BLOOD USED IN REDEMPITIVE PURPOSES

In the OT, blood is significant, when considering the solemn ceremonies of religious worship. "It was used with reference to the first Passover and regular sacrificial rites, in putting it on places, things, and people, with the acceptance that nothing else, but blood alone, could avail,"⁸⁰ for man's transgression, and to appease God's anger. It represents life, because blood is the life of the flesh. When blood is separated from the flesh, physical life, whether in the man or beast, comes to end. As a result, bloodshed stands not for the release of life from the body, the burden of the flesh, but for the bringing of an end of life in the flesh.⁸¹

The Blood Saves Humanity from Total Destruction

When God was about to release the Israelites from Pharaoh's rule, He established the first Passover by instructing them to choose a lamb without defect,⁸² slaughter it for their evening meal, and smear their door frames with its blood. God promised Israel that He would pass over their homes,

⁷⁶ Stibbs, *The Meaning of the Word Blood*, p. 11.

⁷⁷ "Blood", in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, 4 vols, Geoffrey W. Bromley, et al, eds (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1979), p. 526.

⁷⁸ A. M. Stibbs, *The Meaning of the Word Blood*, p. 3.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 9-17.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁸² Ex 12:3-7; Lev 22:8-25.

when He saw the blood on their door posts.⁸³ Some scholars stress that this deed was designed to protect those within from outside hostile powers.⁸⁴ Other scholars propose that the blood was used to purify the Israelite dwellings, a suggestion, sustained by reference to the use of hyssop, which is elsewhere associated with purification. However, the blood symbolised a sacrifice, offered as a substitute, one life laid down for another. It is recognised and confirmed by God Himself, as the Passover sacrifice of the Lord.⁸⁵ Yarbrough explains:

The OT passage speaks of the atonement, in terms of sacrifice, and offering of the blood of a suitable victim. The people's unintentional sin, which deserved death, could be atoned for, through the death of a prescribed animal, suitably chosen and offered in their place. . . . Throughout the OT, God provides the sacrifice, and ensures the atoning efficacy of the ritual He prescribes: "I have given [the blood of the sacrifice] to you to make atonement for yourself on the altar" (Lev 17:11).⁸⁶

The Blood Cleanses All Unrighteousness

One of the central themes of the NT is that, without the shedding of the blood, there is no remission of sin (Heb 10: 27). God does not take sin lightly, and, therefore, the cost was that His son should bear the penalty of our unrighteousness, so that grace may be sought, through faith in His death. "What God in Christ has done for us, through the cross, is to rescue us, disclose Himself, and overcome evil."⁸⁷ Our righteousness and good deeds are what the scriptures says are "like filthy rags", and, for that reason, God gave His only begotten Son as a ransom that many might come to know His saving grace. Sin leaves a stain in the soul that nothing can

⁸³ M. R. de Haan, *The Tabernacle* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1955), p. 128.

⁸⁴ Ex 12:13, 23.

⁸⁵ T. D. Alexander, "Exodus", in *New Bible Commentary*, D. A. Carson, et al, eds (Leicester UK: IVP, 1994), p. 102.

⁸⁶ R. W. Yarbrough, "Atonement", in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, T. D. Alexander, and Brian S. Rosner, eds (Leicester UK: IVP, 2000), pp. 389, 390.

⁸⁷ John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Leicester UK: IVP, 1996), p. 167.

wash away, except Jesus alone, who washes away our sins with His blood.⁸⁸ Stott affirms that:

man is alienated from God by sin, and God is alienated from man by wrath. It is in the substitutionary death of Christ that sin is overcome, and wrath averted, so that God can look on man without displeasure, and man can look on God without fear. Sin is expiated, and God is propitiated.⁸⁹

The Creator has been separated from His creation, but they are finally reconciled, making peace, through the blood shed on the cross (Eph 2:13; Col 1:20). “Nevertheless, the cleansing is a continuous process, and not done once.”⁹⁰

The Blood Purchases Christians⁹¹

The word “bought” is familiar, and understood by everybody. Traditionally, trading occupies a great place in Melanesian lives, because, from time to time, they engage in buying and selling. The idea attached to it is clearly perceived by those involved. What previously was not yours becomes your property, since you have paid a price for it. Listen to the heavenly hymn: “you have purchased us to God by the blood”, signifying “the lamb that is . . . worthy to take the scroll, and open its seals, because He was slaughtered. With His blood He purchased people for God from every tribe, language, people, and nation” (Rev 5:9).

Through the blood of Jesus, a man can be justified, his sins atoned for, and he can be redeemed from the wrath of God (Rom 3:25; 5:9; Eph 1:7; 2:13). “There is no magical power attributed to the blood, and there is no trace of blood mysticism. Salvation is not linked with blood itself, but to the blood shed, that is, the death of Jesus Christ.”⁹² It denotes the loss of life, in order

⁸⁸ Rev 1:5; 7:14-15.

⁸⁹ Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 176.

⁹⁰ Nigel Turner, *Christian Words* (Edinburgh UK: T. & T. Clark, 1980), p. 53.

⁹¹ Andrew Murray, *The Blood of the Cross* (New Kensington PA: Whitaker House, 1981), p. 103.

⁹² “Blood”, in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, p. 403.

to save souls from perishing. Christians are, therefore, challenged to reexamine themselves, by not putting their trust in their ancestor's beliefs, but look to Jesus Christ, as the author and perfecter of their faith.

A MELANESIAN APPROACH TO A CONTEXTUALISED BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

After the previous section made clear the different views on the concept of blood, this section will attempt to contextualise these thoughts, to benefit indigenous Christians, so that they may grasp hold of their significance, and progressively build upon them, with their spiritual endeavour.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXTUALISATION

Contextualisation is an applied method of presenting the gospel message, from its cultural horizon of the biblical world, to another group of people within their cultural horizon, with equal authenticity, as that given in the original biblical context.⁹³ As Hitchen puts it:

In contextualisation, we go, with all our culturally-acquired assumptions, experience, and agenda, to the scriptures, with their different cultural backgrounds, presuppositions, and priorities. We hear for ourselves the same living message God intended for the first readers, so that we can then go to people, in yet another cultural setting, with yet another list of action priorities, and explain the biblical message, so that they receive it with the same impact as it held for the first readers.⁹⁴

The great apostle, Paul, who was under a directive to bring light to the Jewish nation, was rejected by his own kinsmen. He thus focused more on the Gentile world, to fulfil the promises of God in the prophetic writings; "praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to Him all you peoples" (Rom 15:9-12). Paul quotes from Isaiah, saying; "the root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will

⁹³ John M. Hitchen, "The Culture and the Bible – The Question of Contextualisation", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 8-2 (1992), pp. 30-31.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

hope in Him” (Is 11:10). The word “Gentiles”, in common language, was often used to mean non-Jews or pagans. However, the basic biblical meaning is “people of other (i.e., non-Jewish) cultures”.⁹⁵ The task of contextualisation is given urgency, by placing people of other cultures in the place of “Gentiles”.⁹⁶ Contextualisation is a continuing development of making the Word of God relevant to contemporary settings. Indeed, the Word of God demands it, if spiritual progress is to be made in people’s lives in Melanesia. It is essential for an understanding of God’s self-revelation.

When God chose to disclose Himself to people in the past, He gave their human culture an importance for salvation. As the Lord of all creation, He oversees the destinies and affairs of every ethnic group.⁹⁷ God had it planned that, through the gospel, people of other cultures would become heirs together with Israel, members of one body, and would share together in the promises in Christ (Eph 3:1-12). The NT gives account of a new beginning for people of diverse cultures, when, on the day of Pentecost, people of different ethnicity, heard for the first time what God had in store for them (Acts 2:1-12). It was an era, in which God highly esteemed every culture, and lovingly invited them to have faith in His son, Jesus Christ.

Contextualisation is Appropriate in All Cultures

In every culture, there are positive elements that are favourable to the understanding of the gospel. Culture makes possible certain approaches to the gospel, and brings to light certain aspects that, in other cultures, remain less visible or hidden. As Hitchen puts it, “God does not reveal Himself in some Platonic ideal realm, but His truth always operates in the real world of a particular culture.”⁹⁸ Pwahau comments: “In the past, culture had been the rule of life, and people knew with certainty that there was a spirit being

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Acts 17:24-28; 1 Sam 2:2-10; Jer 12:14-17.

⁹⁸ Hitchen, “The Culture and the Bible”, p. 32.

superior to them, and this spirit being was revealed to them more clearly when the early missionaries arrived.”⁹⁹

This is similarly expressed by Paul, in his visit to the Areopagus. People there were very religious, and even worshipped an unknown god, whom Paul revealed more clearly to them.¹⁰⁰ It is the task of the interpreter to unveil the teachings from their cultural wrappings to determine a universal truth or principle.¹⁰¹ Bartle comments that, “If we are to be good communicators of the gospel, we need to use the styles of communication appropriate to the local context that are familiar to the people, and so are effective.”¹⁰² Traditional myths, or other well-known stories, are points of contact that God, in His sovereignty, has preserved in culture. Thus, it is possible to contextualise the cultural theory of the power of *ndraii*, to bring relevant meaning for the Christians in Ndranou.

Contextualising ndraii as Relationship

Since the scriptures tell us of God’s universal redemption of all cultures, people become *ndraii* (spiritual blood brothers and family members), through the acceptance of the gospel (John 1:12-13),¹⁰³ by believing in the powerful *ndraii* (blood) of the Lord Jesus. Despite Melanesian cultural boundaries and ethnic separation, people can become spiritually related, through faith in Jesus Christ. According to Gal 3:28, there is no racial distinction, social division, or gender difference.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Simon Pwahau, of Ndranou village, interview by author, September 1, 2008.

¹⁰⁰ Acts 17:22-34.

¹⁰¹ Robertson McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible* (Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1983), p. 286.

¹⁰² Bartle, *Death, Witchcraft, and the Spirit World*, p. 185.

¹⁰³ “Yet to all who received Him . . . who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision, or of a husband’s will, but born of God.”

¹⁰⁴ Gal 3:26-28: “It is through faith that all of you are God’s children in union with Christ Jesus. You were baptised into union with Christ, and now you are clothed, so to speak, with the life of Christ Himself. So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free people, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus.”

All ethnic and cultural prejudice can be done away with, and everyone should be gathered as one family. People would then begin to relate to each other, through their cultural relationships in this newfound faith. From a biblical perspective, Christians are encouraged to continually come together for spiritual enrichment (Heb 1:25). In Manus, as in other cultures of the world, *ndraii* and “family” mean the same thing. Strong family ties are something Melanesian cultures still enjoy today. This is definitely not practised in Western societies, where family ties are limited to the nuclear family. In Melanesia, when people isolate themselves from socialising with members of their family, it is resented. These people are being short-sighted, and may be destroying themselves and their children’s birthrights, in terms of family land ownership and other matters.¹⁰⁵

Similarly, when Christians avoid being together with the church of God for fellowship and other religious activities, they will definitely grow spiritually cold and dry. This is not what God intends. Just as our culture binds us to family relationships, and the activities associated with our lifestyle, the church in Melanesia could have a tremendous impact if church life was done according to our cultural setup. An example of this is that money, currently given to the service of God, is a problem in the ECOM. However, the same person, who finds it hard to give to God, finds it easy to give to relatives, in payment of bride-price, or at times of death. If Christians can understand their new relationship with Christ, and operate with the same cultural routine of relationship building, giving to the church will have a new meaning for indigenous believers.

Contextualising ndraii as an Inherited Character Trait

In the NT, scripture decisively pronounces that “sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and, in this way, death came to all men, because everyone has sinned”.¹⁰⁶ This simply means that all human beings automatically inherited sin and death through our ancestor Adam. Similarly, in the cultural settings of Ndranou, there are certain qualities that are attributed to certain clans or people, as inherited, to be continuous in

¹⁰⁵ Minol, questionnaire, 2008. Dr Minol comes from the village referred to.

¹⁰⁶ Rom 5:12: “Sin came into the world through one man, and his sin brought death with it. As a result, death has spread to the whole human race, because everyone has sinned.”

their blood. It is often thought that inheriting such qualities represents one's identity, whether good qualities or bad qualities; both are inherited through blood. For instance, if a clan is known for its warrior skills, it is known as *su-daye pahun*.¹⁰⁷ This way of thinking is sometimes applied in contemporary settings. A person with the skills of a warrior will apply these inherited character traits in fighting for peace, or in serving the Lord; in Paul's words, as "fighting the good fight of faith" (1 Tim 1:18).

There are other clans, or persons of a particular tribe, known as *yapan*.¹⁰⁸ This is a title given to clansmen, or a particular person, who possesses a higher quality of decency, honesty, and integrity, and is highly esteemed within the specified community. Timothy stated that:

Lapan is the Manus title for a particular chief, superior to all other chiefs in the community. He holds the highest status, and is regarded as a man of honesty, integrity, and dignity, and cares for his people. Therefore, a Manus *lapan* fits a picture of the deliverer, or saviour, and peacekeeper, and a person who provides for the unfortunate people. But there is another *Lapan* who is much more superior to the Manus *lapan*. He deserves to be attributed the Manusian traditional title: *Lapan Heillian* (Holy Chief). Christ, our *Lapan Heillian*, is the only Saviour, who has the power and authority to deliver mankind out of bondage.¹⁰⁹

Applying these concepts to the contemporary church would be of great advantage. Sometimes, the focus is on the negative aspects of life, but the positive features could be applied, for the good of the church. A traditional *Yapan* can be a blessing to the church and the community, if he is

¹⁰⁷ This means a particular clan has inherited the skills of a warrior in their blood, and all children and grandchildren will continue to receive this in their lifetimes. This understanding could be applied to the religious scenario, to promote righteousness against evil, or to encourage such people to become leaders of a community, for bringing about social justice.

¹⁰⁸ *Yapan* and *Lapan* mean the same thing, used in slightly different dialects. The title is also given to the God of the Bible.

¹⁰⁹ Samuel Timothy, "The Evangelical Church of Manus: its Philosophy and Contemporary Issues for New Millennium" (unpublished B.Th. thesis, Banz PNG: CLTC, 2008), p. 27.

transformed by faith in Jesus Christ. The process of contextualising such inherited goodness will have a positive effect in the church of Ndranou, and Manus as well. While the *Yapan* of Manus focuses mainly on his earthly recognition, and social status, within a specified community, the transformed *Yapan*, in Jesus, could apply the same principle. In this case, it conforms to the biblical standards, making Jesus Christ superior, and Lord over the cultural governing system. Its main focus would be to lead people to have faith in the Lord Jesus.

Contextualising ndraii Through Adoption

Adopting a son or daughter into a family is a natural and legitimate practice among the three ethnic groups in Manus. “The son then takes the family name, and so, is credited with the status and privileges of legitimate sonship.”¹¹⁰ This practice has penetrated other national institutions in the country, in which students make friends with other students (so to speak, from the Western perspective) from different ethnic groups, and become part of their family.¹¹¹ They then share with them common responsibilities. With this cultural analogy in mind, the believer can fully understand himself as a son of God, adopted by grace, receiving the privileges of a natural son, with all the rights of inheritance.

In the same way, Paul used the Roman culture, when wrestling with the mystery of adoption into the kingdom of God. He explained that the union of Christians with Christ was legal, enabling them to become heirs to the heavenly kingdom. The Greek word ὑιοθεσία = *huiiothesia*, rendered “adoption”, means to be “placed as a son”.¹¹² It is a legal adoption process, with privileges for the heir, and provision for the adopting parents.¹¹³ In the 1st century, many Romans, who had no sons of their own, would choose a boy to perpetuate their name, and inherit their estate. The word

¹¹⁰ H. D. McDonald, *Salvation* (Westchester IL: Crossway Books, 1982), p. 12.

¹¹¹ The author, while shepherding a local church at Loniu in Manus Province, witnessed this practice in the villages.

¹¹² Richard W. de Haan, *The World on Trial: Studies in Romans* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1970), p. 93.

¹¹³ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved By Grace* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1973), p. 185.

“ ‘sonship’ here denotes the release from the condition of slavery, and the enjoyment of a glorious freedom”.¹¹⁴ Therefore, for the Christians of Ndranou, understanding this concept would definitely strengthen their faith.

SIMILARITIES AND CONTRASTS IN NDRAII

From the two views discussed, one can observe that both the Bible and Ndranou culture encompass the significance and the power of blood. Blood is regarded as so powerful that it affects a person’s daily life. They differ primarily on the object of blood, and the end products. However, belief in the power of blood, from the cultural standpoint, can be applied to the biblical concept. “Such established beliefs open doors to the acceptance of the gospel, and the gospel, in turn, sheds light on these beliefs.”¹¹⁵ Believers can now discard their concept of ancestral blood, and apply the same faith in Jesus’ blood, as the only means of their hope and redemption. It can be profitable, in the context of Ndranou, and even Manus peoples, for they share the same cultural beliefs. By careful teaching and reasoning on the importance of blood, people will tend to realise the logic and argument.

The diagram below gives a brief description of this concept:

¹¹⁴ De Haan, *The World on Trial*, 93.

¹¹⁵ Bartle, “Death, Witchcraft, and the Spirit World”, 185.

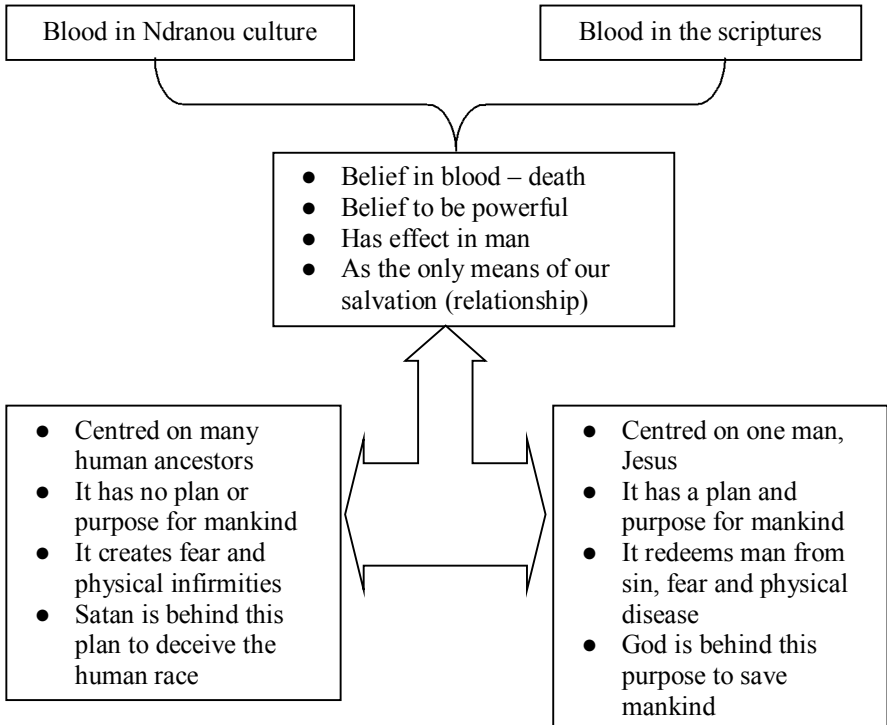


Figure 1: Similarities and Contrasts

From these similarities and contrasts, it can be seen, by reason and experience, that the blood of Jesus is supreme. It is wonderful, since its purpose is to redeem mankind from fear, sickness, and sin.¹¹⁶ Christ was crucified, and He shed His blood for our sin, He was pierced for our transgressions, and He was crushed for our iniquities, and by His wounds we are healed.¹¹⁷ This does not mean that cultural beliefs are not important. Rather, these cultural analogies open the way to understand God's purpose for mankind, so that people will respond positively to the gospel. In many cultures, rituals and myths open people's minds and hearts to the gospel.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Rev 1:5; Rom 3:25.

¹¹⁷ Is 53:4-5.

¹¹⁸ Bartle, *Death, Witchcraft, and the Spirit World*, pp. 183-184.

Sickness and physical infirmities will affect only those who are somehow related to the person's shed blood. People who have no genealogical connection will not be affected. This indicates that ancestral blood is limited and confined, in its geography, and people group. This is not so with the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. From the scientific perspective, it could be said that Christ's blood group is O, and universal. It fits every people group everywhere. Its fundamental purpose is to save people of all languages, nations, and tongues, to be submissive to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.¹¹⁹ Jesus in His earthly ministry, said; "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They, too, will listen to My voice, and there shall be one flock, and one shepherd."¹²⁰

RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this paper has been to discuss a legacy of cultural beliefs, as practised within Christianity at Ndranou. These beliefs have paved the way for the spiritual, ethical, and moral decline in the church. The paper has detailed, in particular, the syncretistic endeavours of believers, from their cultural influences, and animistic background, that have disqualified Christians from being faithful to their spiritual commitment.

In this section, recommendations will be made for pastors and lay people of the Ndranou local church, and the ECOM, to seriously provide ways to prevent this problem from taking root among believers. Before Christians fall away from their loyalty and commitment to God, it would, therefore, be wise for these remedies to be considered, and implemented.

A Change to the Maria Molnar Bible Training College Curriculum

The author, having been a student at the ECOM Bible Training College (BTC), is able to compare courses provided at CLTC, and recommend that certain modules, taught there, be included in the BTC curriculum. The following course modules are relevant for addressing current specific issues in ECOM:

¹¹⁹ Eph 1:20-23.

¹²⁰ John 10:16.

- Cultural Anthropology should be taught on how people relate to certain beliefs, values, and customs. This would enable people to be in a better position to make changes in their lives. Although culture begins with God, culture is totally tainted with sin, and, therefore, all culture should be measured against what the scripture says.
- There should be study of the book of Exodus, in which God reveals Himself as Yahweh, before the Israelites and the Egyptian gods. This course identifies God's nature and attributes. Melanesians have an animistic background, and so, this subject is relevant to them. Many Christians still lack knowledge of who God is.
- Another relevant course for the Melanesian context is Eschatology, with its emphasis on the destination of the spirits of deceased people. It appears that Christians continue to have cloudy minds on this subject.
- Christian leaders need better equipping, to become more effective in pastoral ministry. A reflection on Melanesian theology, and the need for contextualisation, should also be part of the curriculum, to prepare leaders for real-life situations.

A Constructive Teaching Method for Local Churches

While the above suggestions are made constructively for the BTC, a well-designed teaching program should also be implemented at the local church level, to address these issues. Programs may vary from church to church, but sufficient time should be allocated to impart biblical teaching, if it is desired to see changes in Christian lives. Paul asked, "How will the people know and believe?" (Rom 10:14-15).¹²¹ Intellectual insights will cause people to acquire proper knowledge¹²² that will lead to genuine faith. The

¹²¹ How will the people know unless we teach them?

¹²² Hos 4:6: People perish, because they lack knowledge; knowledge that leads to genuine faith in God.

apostle Peter, in his letter to Christians in Asia, strongly urged them to “be on their guard that they not be carried away by the error of lawless men, and fall from the secured position, but to *grow in the grace and knowledge* of the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:17-18). For this reason, the author wishes to provide this coaching module as an example, to which Christian leaders should adhere.

These suggested programs could be implemented by way of systematic pulpit preaching, and conducted in weekly Bible studies as well. The same teaching could be applied to Sunday School classes, youth ministry, and women’s fellowship, in a more-simplified style, appropriate to each ministry. To make these programmes more interesting, they could be conducted in retreats and weekend camps in a Melanesian setting. From these strategies, the teaching would penetrate all levels of Christian endeavour. Believers could then reaffirm their commitment, and continue to work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12).¹²³

¹²³ Phil 2:12-13. Paul’s exhortation to the Philippians was to be diligent and serious in working out their own salvation. This also applies to contemporary Melanesian churches, where Christians must be diligent in all matters to do with their salvation, not doing something only occasionally, but persevering in all that they do to the end.

NDRANOU LOCAL CHURCH COACHING SYLLABUS

<i>Course outcome and content</i>	<i>Possible subjects to be taught</i>
Outcome 1: The congregation will demonstrate balanced understanding	
Content and learning experience needed to achieve this outcome: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understand truth from error ● Know God from heathen gods ● The place of ancestral spirits in Christianity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Communicating Christ in an animistic context ● The Book of Exodus ● Eschatology ● Syncretism in the book of Colossians ● Selected topics on spirits in the Bible
Outcome 2: The congregation will demonstrate Christian maturity	
Content and learning experience needed to achieve this outcome: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Know the meaning Jesus' death ● Grow in spiritual maturity ● Christian living which pleases God 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Jesus of Nazareth (parts 1 and 2) ● The Book of Romans ● <i>Come Follow Me</i> (TEE discipleship)
Outcome 3: The congregation will be able to know right from wrong	
Content and learning experience needed to achieve this outcome: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understand major ethical issues ● Know sound biblical doctrine ● Lead by example 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Be aware of Christian ethics ● The Pauline epistles ● Bible characters of the Old Testament

Table 1: Teaching Syllabus

CONCLUSION

In summary, the cultural beliefs and practices of *ndraii* and *mengndraii* have been observed among the people of Ndranou, and how their impact is evident in their lives. We have noted the manifestations that are the outcome of these cultural influences and demonic power. These manifestations entice people into deception, thereby encouraging them to continue in their syncretistic lifestyles. Moreover, the paper has given the ultimate solution to the approach of believers to salvation, by giving direction on how to have faith in the powerful blood of Jesus. The ancestral blood produces horrific results, whereas the blood of Jesus gives superior results to human religious endeavour. ECOM could develop the best Christians, fully dedicated to God, if these proposed recommendations are applied at the BTC, and in its local churches. Believers would commit

themselves to the God who rescues and saves,¹²⁴ as a result of presentations of sound biblical knowledge, which specifically address their struggles. The exciting outcomes will be that ECOM will experience renewal, and believers will be rooted in sound doctrine.

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¹²⁴ Michael Raiter, Principal, Bible College of Victoria, at Banz PNG: CLTC Annual Thanksgiving Day, September 7, 2008. Raiter challenged Christians to be loyal to the God who rescues and saves them from eternal condemnation, even if they encounter difficult times.

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TOWARDS A CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY OF BRIDE-PRICE IN THE SIMBU PROVINCE

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INTRODUCTION

A pastor and his family came and lived with the author in Lae, some years ago, while he was doing pastoral ministry. They left the author, and returned to their village. After some years, the pastor returned. The author asked him about his wife and son. He replied, “My wife’s people told me to get K15,000, 10 pigs, and two cassowaries, if I want to get my family back, so here I am looking for money.”¹ The pastor never found the money, and eventually married another woman. Who is to blame? This pastor’s dilemma prompted the writing of this article. Accordingly, this article will present an overview of bride-price in Simbu society,² the relationship between bride-price and the marriage union, and the effects of bride-price on the Simbu people. Finally, it will suggest recommendations for the future.

OVERVIEW OF BRIDE-PRICE

DEFINING OF BRIDE-PRICE

“Bride-price” is a combination of two words, “bride” and “price”. Firstly, “bride” implies a “woman”. Secondly, “price” means “payment”. Therefore, combined, they indicate payment for a woman. Strathern defines it as “bride wealth”,³ meaning the groom presents certain articles to

¹ Tony Manzie, of Lae, interview by the author, March 23, 2006.

² Simbu, a province of Papua New Guinea, has a population of 144,000 people. It is located in the Highlands. Four different languages are spoken there.

³ Andrew Strathern, *One Father, One Blood* (London UK: Tavistock, 1972), p. 12.

the bride, which are seen by the people as wealth. Also, Malinowski calls it “marriage gift”,⁴ meaning, what is presented by the groom, are gifts. Moreover, Lea also calls it “marriage payment”,⁵ meaning people view this as the actual payment for one being bought, in order to be married to another. The Neo-Melanesian Tok Pisin expression is *baim meri*.⁶ And, in the Kuman⁷ language, it is known as *ambu topraqua*,⁸ meaning “payment for a woman”. There may be other terms used by different societies.

CULTURAL METHODS OF PAYMENT

The bride-price belongs to the traditional past of the Simbu people. However, before modern money was used, what form did the payment take? The groom’s clan knew that they were not just getting the woman to be with them, they were obliged to give something to the woman’s clan, before she could dwell with them. So, to answer the above question, pigs, cassowaries, birds of paradise, cuscuses, stone axes, kina shells, taro, *kaukau* (sweet potato), and other food items, were used as payment. Wagner agrees, “The traditional bride-price was paid in garden produce, pigs, or valuable ornaments.”⁹ The custom was that a woman will never get married free of charge, there ought to be a cost involved.

On the contrary, in Western society, bride-price is not even practised. When couples want to get married, they hold a wedding, and invite people to attend. The wedding ceremony notifies the people that the couple are duly husband and wife. Graf mentions some Americans practice what they call a dowry payment,¹⁰ where the bride’s parents bring gifts, and present

⁴ Bronislaw Malinowski, *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia* (London UK: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1929), p. 76.

⁵ D. A. M. Lea, and P. G. Irwin, *New Guinea: The Territory and its People* (Melbourne Vic: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 54.

⁶ Buying women.

⁷ Kuman is the major language spoken in Simbu Province of PNG.

⁸ Willie Bergmann, *Kuman Kere Buk 2* (Madang PNG: Luther Press, 1969), p. 23.

⁹ Richard Wagner, “A Theology of Bride-price”, in *Marriage in Melanesia: A Theological Perspective Point 11* (1987), p. 155.

¹⁰ Money or property that a woman brings to her future husband as a gift from her own family. Susan Maingay, and Sheila Dignen, *Longman Active Study Dictionary* (Harlow UK: Longman UK, 1991), p. 215.

them to the groom. This is to signify to the groom that, in receiving the dowry, he must look after their daughter in the future.¹¹ It means the dowry just serves as security for the couple. Another difference between bride-price and the dowry is this: the bride-price is a demand the man must always meet. But a dowry is given, out of free will, by the woman's parents, out of concern for their daughter.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES

The Bible does not specifically mention bride-price practices. However, it does have examples, where bride-price comes to light, as is seen in Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT) concepts.

Isaac and Rebecca (Gen 24)

Abraham was old, and well advanced in years. Before he died, he desired a wife for his son Isaac. Therefore, he sent the chief servant of his household to get a wife from among his own relatives. The servant went and met Rebecca, but, before he actually took her to Isaac, he gave gold, silver, and other costly gifts, to Rebecca and her family. This story assumes that the concept of bride-price was practised by the Middle-Eastern people back then. The servant did not just take Rebecca away. He had to give something first, before departing.

The *New Bible Commentary* mentions that, elsewhere, this is called the bride-price, or the marriage present, that sealed the betrothal agreement.¹² When agreement is reached, there ought to be action taking place, which is why the servant gave the family the bride-price. Evans says; "The husband and his family gave gifts, and it was more a seal of covenant between the two families."¹³ It means that there was no delay in the payment, it was a quick response by the man to meet the cost. These gifts highlighted that Rebecca was paid for in this act, because, nowhere in the context of Genesis, or any of the other biblical books, is it written about any payment being made by Isaac again.

¹¹ Jeff Graf, lecturer at CLTC, Banz PNG. Interview, August 25, 2008.

¹² D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, and G J Wenham, eds, *New Bible Commentary* (Leicester UK: IVP, 1994), p. 77.

¹³ Evans Williams, *The Great Doctrine of the Bible* (Manila: OMF Literature, 1974), p. 338.

Jacob, Leah, and Rachel (Gen 29:14b-30)

Jacob was made to work for his uncle Laban for 14 years for Leah and Rachel, instead of paying the bride-price. The aspect of bride-price was there. Just because Jacob was a relative of Laban, he was not exempt from the bride-price. However, he substitutes the bride-price for labour. As Tenney points out, normally betrothal was sealed by the payment of the bride-price, given by the man's family. Jacob, without any family support, could not make the usual payment, so he offered to work seven years for Rachel's hand. However, he was given Leah instead, so he decided to work another seven years for Rachel also.¹⁴

Dinah (Jacob's daughter) and Shechem (a Hivite) (Gen 34:1-12)

Here is a classic example of the bride-price. Shechem fell in love with Dinah, and asked Jacob and his sons if he could marry her. He was willing to pay the bride-price. In fact, he, himself, offered to pay whatever amount Dinah's brothers might charge him. This implies the Canaanites also practised bride-price payment.

Christ and the Church

The church is often referred to as the bride, and Christ as the bride-groom.¹⁵ Paul stressed to the Corinthians that they had been bought with a price.¹⁶ The church is called the bride of Christ, and has been purchased by Christ's own blood.¹⁷ He shed His own blood, as bride-price for the church (2 Pet 2:1). Ellsworth mentions that the blood of Christ is the price.¹⁸ Truly, this blood was the most precious and most valuable marriage payment ever made.

¹⁴ Merrill C. Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1975), p. 96.

¹⁵ John 3:29; Matt 25:1-5; Rev 19:7; 21:2-9; 22:17; Eph 5:25-27.

¹⁶ 1 Cor 6:19b.

¹⁷ Acts 20:28.

¹⁸ Roger Ellsworth, *Strengthening Christ's Church: The message of 1 Corinthians* (Durham UK: Evangelical Press, 1995), p. 15.

BRIDE-PRICE AND THE MARRIAGE UNION

In Simbu society, before the bride-price is given, the couples must first be recognised as being married. In some societies, the bride-price must be given first, before a marriage can be recognised. The point here is that, without a marriage having taken place, there will be no bride-price. The two must always go together, which is why it is very important to fully understand what marriage is. The *Oxford Dictionary* defines marriage as, “a legal union of man and woman, for the purpose of living together”.¹⁹ Mantovani defines its Melanesian aspect as the joining of two different parties, for the purpose of serving its community.²⁰ The *International Bible Dictionary* defines marriage as, “The union for life of one man and one woman, as an ordinance of the Creator.”²¹ Looking at these different definitions from different sources, they all highlight that marriage is a very special act. God, Himself, instituted marriage in the beginning.²² No man introduced the concept of marriage. It originated with God, and this is why it must not be taken for granted.

Once the true concept of marriage is understood, it is important to determine the motivating factors leading to marriage. Firstly, one aspect that leads to marriage is love,²³ with the man and the woman being attracted to each other. This attraction eventually leads them to get married. It allows them to get to know each other well before the marriage takes place.

A second aspect that leads to marriage is the bride-price aspect. There are many people in Simbu society, who marry this way. A man can marry a woman by offering a bride-price to her parents. For example, there was a former Member of Parliament, who saw a beautiful schoolgirl, and desired

¹⁹ Maurice Waite, *The Little Oxford Dictionary* (Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 389.

²⁰ Ennio Mantovani, “Traditional Values and Marriage”, in *Marriage in Melanesia: A Theological Perspective* Point 11 (1987), p. 1.

²¹ James Gall, *International Bible Dictionary* (Plainfield NJ: Logos International, 1977), p. 273.

²² Ian Malins, *Christian Marriage and Family Life* (Wewak PNG: Christian Books Melanesia, 1987), p. 34.

²³ Ossie Fountain, *Marriage is for Life: A Handbook on Family Life* (Wewak PNG: Christian Books Melanesia, 1977), p. 12.

to marry her. He went to her parents with K16,000 in cash, and offered the money as a bride-price. The parents, upon seeing the money, were shocked, and gave their daughter to the politician. What a tragedy! The aspect of love was never considered. Money became the motivating force in this marriage. There are so many marriages taking place this way, because men are going with substantial amounts of money as bride-price, and getting married to any girl they desire. Sadly, love is not considered, but the bride-price is the key factor in many marriages today in Simbu society.

THE POSITIVE EFFECTS OF BRIDE-PRICE IN SIMBU SOCIETY

PEACE

When two clans are in the process of fighting, one will initiate peace by giving one of their daughters to the other clan. One of their young men will accept her hand. When the two are married, the people will view this as the start of peace, because the marriage unites the clans as one.

Fountain mentions that a marriage is fundamentally a contract between two clans, which were often enemies.²⁴ Therefore, the act of sealing the marriage contract, and securing peace, is by means of the bride-price. The inclusion of the bride-price in the worldview of the two clans determines that, as long as this marriage lasts, they will never fight again, because the bride-price is viewed as the seal of peace.

UNITY

Therefore, in Simbu society, because marriages bring different clans together, and bride-price is the seal, the clans will always be united. Fountain also notes, "In many areas, where inter-clan fighting was common, marriages helped to fasten enemy groups together."²⁵ It is true that, in Simbu society, marriage does bring people together, but what keeps that unity intact is the bride-price. It is only as a result of bride-price

²⁴ Ossie Fountain, *Melanesian Beliefs and Problems about Marriage* (Wewak PNG: Christian Books Melanesia, 2000), p. 4.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 5.

giving, when the two clans make promises, plant trees or flowers, or set up stones as a monument, that this unity will last.

ECONOMIC INPUT

At the time, when the bride-price is determined by the bride's clan, they will get together and evaluate things carefully, before setting the price. Vulum mentions that the money the groom's clan will give will benefit the bride's clan.²⁶ The bride-price is, therefore, set as an adequate amount for everyone to share. Once the groom's clan presents the bride-price, the bride's clan will rejoice greatly. They gain money, extra pigs, cassowaries, cuscuses, store goods, and garden items. That is why people in Simbu society understand that, when a bride-price is received, their economic well-being will increase dramatically.

A WOMAN HAS VALUE

In the community, those women, who have been paid for, are regarded by their clansmen as valuable. Arul confirms this, "*Ol meri igat namba em ol meri mipela kaikai long han bilong ol*",²⁷ meaning "the women, who are valuable, are those the people benefit from". What Arul says is true. Women, whose bride-price has been paid, will be respected greatly. However, those women who are married, but are without a bride-price having been paid, are viewed as valueless. Why? It is because a woman's value is determined by the bride-price arrangement. In any marriage in Simbu society, unless bride-price is involved, a woman will not be viewed as valuable.

THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF BRIDE-PRICE IN SIMBU SOCIETY

FAMILY VIOLENCE

Unfortunately, because the man makes the payment, he will see this as giving him the right to beat his wife. He will tell his wife that, as she has been paid for, she must always submit to him. He will see his wife as his private property. "In Papua New Guinea, many men, who have paid bride-

²⁶ Sam Vulum, "Bride-price Still Very Much Alive in PNG", np [sighted August 20, 2008]. Online: <http://en.pacificmagazine.png.htm>.

²⁷ Witne Arul, a small business man of Banz, interview by author August 29, 2008.

prices for their wives, view their wives as their property, and they can do anything to them.”²⁸ Despite this finding, it must not be implied that men do not have regard for their wives. The wife, however, realises that she cannot run away; because, if she does, she will impose a big burden on her parents and clansmen of returning the bride-price. All she can do is to fight back in self-defence. Thus, the bride-price can lead to a devastating disaster, known as family violence.

POLYGAMY

The people in Simbu society view bride-price as the seal of marriage. This view has had a dramatic impact, especially upon women. However, often, when a man knows that his marriage has been secured by a bride-price, he turns to other women. As long as he has the money, and approval from his clansmen, he can marry other women. Some reasons, he is likely to give, regarding having more wives, are: the first woman is lazy; the workload is too much for only one woman; he has lots of plots of land, and he needs many children. Gunwa believes that some men have many wives, in order to be recognised.²⁹ What he means is that men who have many wives will be regarded as “big men” in the Simbu culture. Sil has stressed that, because bride-price is the focal point of marriage, men, who have money, are in a better position to have many wives.³⁰ Truly, because money is an influential thing, it makes possible many polygamous marriages in Simbu society today.

CAUSING POVERTY

The standard of bride-price cost is rising rapidly, and it could double over the next five years. Average people have been affected badly. It can take a person’s whole life savings to pay the bride-price. As Bosuk says, “After paying of the high bride-price, the boy and his family are left with nothing, in terms of money and other wealth, and they have to start all over again to

²⁸ John Dray, *Papua New Guinea Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, np, August 20, 2008, <http://www.state.gov.html>.

²⁹ Boi Gunwa, subsistence farmer of Banz PNG, interview by the author, August 29, 2008.

³⁰ Tom Sil, teacher at Gon Primary school, Kundiawa PNG, interview by author, January 20, 2007.

recover the loss they suffered.”³¹ Bride-price time is certainly a celebration time, but, when the celebration is over, sadness is felt, because the boy, his family, and clansmen then realise that they have nothing left. Asuwe says, “*Bilong wanem na mi baim meri? Nau mi nogat pik, moni na kaikai bilong gaden.*”³² This means, “Why did I pay the bride-price? Now I do not have pigs, money, and garden items.” Suine commented, “*Sapos pasin bilong baim meri nogat, mi bai gat planti samting, mi kamap rabis man bikos mi baim meri.*”³³ This means, “If there were no bride-price, I should have many things. I become poor, because of the bride-price.” Gigmai also says, “Many people are using their daughters as a form of business.”³⁴ These three comments surely reflect the views of the Simbu people. Bride-price can really drain a person’s life savings, inflicting poverty on him.

FINDING A PRACTICAL SOLUTION FOR THE FUTURE

The church, as the bride of Christ, must not hide behind its pulpit and sing songs of hallelujah. It needs to raise its voice, and proclaim the justice of God regarding bride-price. It needs to address these issues, and clarify the thoughts of the people. The following are some proposals of how the church can approach this matter:

- Instruct the people not to use their daughters for economic gain;
- Instruct them not to overcharge the bride-price, but agree to an affordable price;
- Point people to the real meaning and purpose of marriage, and
- Point people to biblical truths, in reference to bride-price.

³¹ Pastor Bosuk, “Bride-price in Papua New Guinea” (B.Th. thesis, Banz PNG: CLTC, 2000), p. 20.

³² Evangelist Dick Asuwe, of Mai Lutheran church, interview by author, January 17, 2008.

³³ John Suine, teacher, of Mai Primary school, Kundiawa PNG, interview by author, January 19, 2008.

³⁴ Peter Gigmai, Dean of Students, CLTC Banz PNG, interview by author, September 1, 2008.

Swindoll insists that the church, as the Bride of Christ, must have a genuine concern for others.³⁵ Genuine concern, in this case, is addressing the bride-price issue. If the church does not address this issue, then who will? The church must do it, at all costs.

In the past, the people followed the traditional bride-price arrangement, and the impact was not as bad. However, with the use and influence of modern money, the impact is now ugly. Before setting the bride-price, the people must consider other things that need to take place also. If the couple is thinking of holding a wedding ceremony, that will be another cost. Bre has calculated that, when you add the bride-price and wedding cost together, it is like a double payment.³⁶ And then there is the cost of paying for the children.³⁷ Moreover, when the need arises, from time to time, the bride's family will go to her husband for help. Counting, and adding up all these costs, makes the marriage very expensive. Therefore, before people decide on the price of the bride, they need to include all the other costs as well.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the bride-price issue is a big problem today, and is having dramatic effects and impact upon Simbu society. Culturally, the real purpose of bride-price was to stabilise two different groups of clans, and bring them together. Bride-price was practised by the ancestors, and is found in the OT. The NT concept pictures Christ as the bride-price giver. Moreover, understanding the real purpose of marriage, money must not be seen as the seal, but, rather, the seal should be love. Love must be the influential thing in marriage.³⁸ Consequently, churches must speak out against greed, pride, and other aspects that are rooted in the bride-price.

³⁵ Charles R. Swindoll, *The Bride: Renewing our Passion for the Church* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1994), p. 47.

³⁶ Henry Bre, "The Real Cost of Bride-price", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 22-2 (2006), p. 11.

³⁷ Husband makes this payment to the wife's brothers for her loss of blood in bearing his children.

³⁸ Herbert Gray, *Men, Women, and God: A Discussion of Sex Questions from the Christian Point of View* (London UK: SCM Press, 1957), p. 130.

Only when people's thoughts are clear about bride-price, will they have a better attitude towards it.

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