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Reaches New Guinea (1849-1900)**

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the Yangoruan Context**

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Personal Reflections**

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Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools



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MELANESIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools

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

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

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

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EDITORIAL

This volume covers a variety of topics related to Melanesia: contextualisation, sorcery, reconciliation, salvation, and fear. Each topic, in its own way, adds to the on-going discussion of applying God's Word in a Melanesian context.

In the first article, I investigate the contextualisation strategies of five leaders in the Anglican church's efforts to establish itself in Papua New Guinea: George Selwyn, John Patteson, Robert Codrington, Copland King, and Montagu Stone-Wigg. I conclude that a missiological redefining of *via media* describes the Anglican church's contextualisation strategy: enculturation within Anglican limits. If we take the time to learn from history, we can learn from the Anglican church's strategies.

In the next article, Ezekiel describes the historical practice of *Tatapa* in Bougainville, relating it to Christ, as our protector. It is a short article, but one that captures the traditional beliefs of the Teop people in the North Bougainville Province. Fear and protection are two real aspects of life in Papua New Guinea. In the end, Ezekiel challenges us to look to Christ for our protection.

Alu describes sorcery attacks among the Hula people of Papua New Guinea. He delves into scripture for an explanation and response, eventually resting on the sovereignty of God. The article deals with an issue real to the people of Papua New Guinea, and Alu has provided a scripturally-reasoned explanation of sorcery. His conclusion that God is supreme, even in sorcery, should bring confidence and comfort to those impacted by such practices.

Aaron looks into his Rennell-Bellona culture, seeking to draw parallels between the *tanu manganga* ritual and the reconciling work of Christ. In the article, he provides an emic view of the ritual, in light of reconciliation, according to God's word. The article should cause each of us to reflect on how we can present Christ more meaningfully within our cultures.

Maxon contrasts the traditional concept of salvation among the Yangoruan people of Papua New Guinea with the biblical concept. In doing so, he provides an insider look at traditional beliefs related to the Yangoruan idea of salvation. His conclusion, that we should stress Christ and His reign, provides a scripturally-valid, yet culturally-relevant, gospel for the Yangoruan people.

In the final article, Gibson provides us with insights into fear in the Melanesian culture, drawing specifically from his personal experiences from living in the Sepik. He reminds us, as we constantly need to be, that we, who are in God's hand, should not succumb to fears of this world.

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.

CONTEXTUALISATION STRATEGIES: THE ANGLICAN CHURCH REACHES NEW GUINEA (1849-1900)

Doug Hanson

Doug lectures at the Christian Leaders' Training College in Papua New Guinea.

INTRODUCTION

Anglican church missionaries arrived on the north coast of New Guinea in 1892, establishing the church in the eventual nation of Papua New Guinea. The story, however, begins decades earlier in 1849 in New Zealand with the founding of the Melanesian Mission. The story progresses, late in the 19th century, with the advent of the New Guinea mission out of the Anglican church in Australia. The story is one of the Anglican church's efforts at relating the gospel message to the Melanesian cultural context. In this study, we will describe and evaluate the approaches used by several Anglican missionaries in communicating the gospel to the Melanesian people.

GEORGE SELWYN: MELANESIAN MISSION FOUNDER

The Melanesian Mission was born out of a transcriber's error, when, at the creation of the New Zealand See, the northern boundary was transcribed as 34°30' north (instead of south).¹ George Selwyn, the first Bishop of New Zealand, took advantage of this error to take the gospel and the Anglican church to the islands of Melanesia. Selwyn, a high churchman, held to the importance of the sacraments, the *Book of Common Prayer* (containing liturgical services of worship), the apostolic succession of the bishops, and

¹ John Garrett, *To Live Among the Stars: Christian Origins in Oceania* (Suva Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1985), p. 182.

the *via media*.² He was also sympathetic to the Oxford Movement and their desire to limit government influence in religious life. John Garrett says of Selwyn, “He stood for a sacramental view of the church, for sound life-long teaching rather than sudden conversion, for the historic episcopate in continuous succession from the primitive church.”³ David Hilliard characterises Selwyn’s missionary philosophy as both evangelical and ecclesiastical.⁴ As a high churchman, Selwyn believed that an inherent part of the gospel was civilising the Melanesians. The sacrament of Holy Communion, for example, used man-made bread and wine, which “required the prior existence of agriculture and commerce”.⁵

Selwyn’s plan was not to rely on European missionaries to reach the people of Melanesia, but on “Melanesian teachers, who would Christianise their own communities from within”.⁶ His goal was to sail willing youth from the islands of Melanesia to New Zealand for training. Selwyn brought the first five recruits to New Zealand from the Loyalty Islands in 1849, thus starting the ministry of the Melanesian Mission.⁷ The arrangement was for the youth to spend the summer studying theology, English, and other subjects at St John’s College, and return home to their islands for the winter to evangelise their people. Henry Venn, the secretary of the evangelical Church Missionary Society in England, spoke against the extraction strategy, arguing instead that the students should be trained within their own environments.⁸ By 1860, 113 Melanesians had spent one summer at

² David Hilliard, *God’s Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942* (St Lucia Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1978), p. 2. *Via media* is the term coined for the Anglican church’s theological position between the Roman Catholic church and Protestants.

³ Garrett, *To Live Among the Stars*, p. 182.

⁴ Hilliard, *God’s Gentlemen*, p. 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8. Selwyn’s nomenclature was “Native Ministry”.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10. The name Melanesian Mission began to be used around 1852.

⁸ Venn also argued against the centralised leadership of missions in a bishop.

St John's College, while 39 had come twice or more.⁹ However, the strategy proved to bear little fruit in the expansion of the church in the islands. A few reasons for this failure was that the English language was foreign to the students, the students' ingrained cultural beliefs could not be overcome with a few months of Christian teaching, and the students were young, and not influential, in their home places.¹⁰

JOHN PATTESON: FIRST BISHOP OF MELANESIA

In 1861, the Anglican church formed the new diocese of Melanesia, and named John Patteson as its first bishop. He was considered a missionary bishop, a new concept in the church, and he began his service by evaluating the strategy implemented by the founder of the Melanesian Mission. As a high churchman, Patteson believed that teaching Melanesians "positive 'dogmatic' truth" was imperative for the establishment of Christianity.¹¹ Hence, the curriculum at St Andrews College at Kohimarama, near Auckland, where Melanesians were now being trained, changed to reflect a more rigorous approach, including indigenous language studies.¹² Hilliard notes, "Patteson devoted himself to the provision of simple grammars and phrase-books of native languages, catechetical literature, and translations of scripture."¹³

By 1867, English was no longer the *lingua franca* of the school, rather the school standardised on Mota – a language used on various Oceania islands. The school then relocated to Norfolk Island, taking on the name of St Barnabas. The length of time students spent at the school grew to 18 months, and eventually six to eight years, in an effort to adequately train the students to be "mission teachers".¹⁴ In 1868, George Sarawia, from

⁹ Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen*, pp. 17-18.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-20.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹² Garrett, *To Live Among the Stars*, p. 183.

¹³ Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen*, p. 31.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

Vanua Lava, was ordained as a deacon, becoming the first Melanesian clergyman.¹⁵

Patteson, in one sense, was “not sympathetic” towards Melanesian religions, believing they were “irrational superstitions”.¹⁶ On the other hand, he recognised the Melanesians’ belief in invisible powers. Therefore, he promoted the “principle of accommodation”, in which “Christianity, as an inherently universal religion, should seek to adapt and assimilate itself to the modes of thought and social needs of each race or society”.¹⁷ Patteson felt there were both unchangeable Christian beliefs, and secondary Christian teachings, that could be adapted to the cultural situation. He argued that Christianity should change Melanesian culture as little as possible, only in those areas that were clearly non-Christian – and Melanesians, themselves, were the best judges of what should be changed.¹⁸ This concept was in contrast to the common British missionary philosophy of civilise, then Christianise, or “Christianity-with-civilisation”.¹⁹ This principle of accommodation was not readily accepted by the Anglican church in England until near the end of the 19th century.²⁰

ROBERT CODRINGTON: MELANESIAN MISSION SCHOLAR

Robert Codrington became headmaster at St Barnabas in 1867, continuing the high-church emphasis of interpreting the Bible through creeds and prayers, and conducting of regular liturgical worship. He viewed conversion “in terms of changes in people’s way of life”.²¹ He believed that to help people change; a missionary must first understand the people.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

²¹ Allan K. Davidson, “The Legacy of Robert Henry Codrington”, in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 27-4 (2003), p. 172.

This showed forth in his work as an anthropologist and linguist. In his research, he was interested in the culture of the Melanesians, but only as expressed by the Melanesians. He published his findings in *The Melanesian Languages* (1885), *The Melanesians* (1891), and *A Dictionary of the Languages of Mota* (1896), with “His classic account of *mana* (‘supernatural power’) in *The Melanesians*” becoming “a stimulus to all subsequent investigators and theorists in the field of comparative religion”.²²

In summary, Allan Davidson depicts the missionary philosophy of Codrington, and his Melanesian Mission predecessors, “The Selwyn-Patteson-Codrington approach encouraged a form of ‘enculturation’ of Christianity in the Melanesian Mission before the word was coined, although that enculturation had distinctive Anglican characteristics.”²³

COPLAND KING: FIRST HEAD OF THE NEW GUINEA MISSION

In 1890, Albert Maclaren, an Anglo-Catholic priest, was travelling in New South Wales raising money for missionary work in New Guinea. Earlier, he had worked with Pacific islands workers on the sugar plantations.²⁴ The Australian Board of Missions, an Anglican body, had appointed him head of the New Guinea mission under the supervision of the Archbishop “of the low-church, evangelical diocese of Sydney”.²⁵ While travelling, he met Copland King, an evangelical, who also desired to be a missionary to New Guinea. They eventually landed on the north New Guinea coast, at Bartle Bay, in 1891, assisted by a local New Guinea man, who had worked on plantations in Australia.²⁶ Unfortunately, Maclaren died a few months after arriving.²⁷

²² Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen*, p. 37.

²³ Davidson, “The Legacy of Robert Henry Codrington”, p. 175.

²⁴ Garrett, *To Live Among the Stars*, p. 246.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

²⁷ C. F. Pascoe, *Two Hundred Years of the SPG: An Historical Account of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1701-1900* (London UK: SPG, 1901), p. 465.

In 1892, the Archbishop of Sydney appointed King as head of the New Guinea mission. The first two converts were baptised in 1893, one, a young man, and the other, a schoolboy.²⁸ King was asked to become the first Bishop of New Guinea in 1898, but turned it down. As an evangelical, he was an anomaly among the other European-descent, Anglo-Catholic missionaries, who came to work in the New Guinea mission. King turned his attention to working among tribal groups in the area, learning the languages, translating portions of scripture and of the Prayer Book, studying local botany, and teaching language to new missionaries.²⁹

As an evangelical, King was concerned about the conversion of the tribal people. He stressed that there must be assurance that baptismal candidates were truly converted, and that they understood the significance of baptism. He used Melanesian teachers to reach people in new areas with the gospel. A challenging aspect of conversion was the lack of recognition by the tribal people that “the acceptance of Christianity with their lips must be followed by an acceptance of it in their lives”.³⁰ Thus, encouraging the converted New Guineans to live the Christian life proved more difficult than having them acknowledge the Christ of Christianity.

King was a student of the local tribal culture, capturing his insights in writing. In *Some Notes on New Guinea*, Copland noted the lack of chiefs, the communality of the society, the totemic matrilineal family-groupings, the practice of polygamy, the crops grown, the ownership of land, marriage and childbirth practices, traditional dress, and the role of medicine men, spirits, feasting, dancing, and funerals in the society. He also logged that

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Gilbert White, *A Pioneer of Papua: Being the Life of the Revd Copeland King, MA: One of the First Two Missionaries of the New Guinea Mission* (London UK: SPCK, 1929). <http://anglicanhistory.org/aus/png/white_king1929/03.html> July 29, 2009.

³⁰ Ibid.

there was no belief in a highest god, which led to discussion on how to translate “God” in the Bible.³¹ King strove to contextualise the scriptures, as evidenced by his sermon on the marriage feast (preached in the local language):

“Now then, come along to the feast, all you people, Guriga Guriga. Here are heaps of food – taro, yams, and bananas. Come along.” But they would not come. So the men went out, and found others, and said, “Come along to the feast.” But one said, “I must go and catch fish”; another said, “I must go and watch my garden”, and so on.³²

King remained an evangelical, but was supportive of the Anglo-Catholic leadership over him. When a Sydney church claimed that the New Guinea mission was not evangelical enough, King responded by implying that only those that work among the New Guineans understand how difficult it is for a New Guinean to understand sin. He also turned the table on the Sydney church by asking them to prove that their “converts are growing in grace”, despite their claim that “The work is man’s; results belong to God.”³³

MELANESIAN MISSIONARIES

One trademark of the New Guinea mission was the use of Melanesian missionaries to evangelise the people of the north New Guinea coast. John Garrett states, “[T]hey were often the first people to share Christianity by day-by-day life . . . [and] ensured that Anglican Christianity did not seem to be simply the religion of the *dimdim* (whites).”³⁴ James Nogar, from

³¹ Copland King, “Some Notes on New Guinea”, in *The East and the West* by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, vol 111 (January 1905), p. 80. See also Copland King, “Notes on Native Tenure and Other Customs of the Bartle Bay District”, in *British New Guinea Annual Report 1894-1895*, Appendix Q, pp. 39-42. Published as *British Parliamentary Papers, General Colonies* 34 (1970), pp. 241-244.

³² White, *A Pioneer of Papua*, <http://anglicanhistory.org/aus/png/white_king1929/03.html> July 29, 2009.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Garrett, *To Live Among the Stars*, p. 247.

Vanuatu, was an example. He stood firm against tribal fighting, refused to appease the traditional spirits, and married into a local tribe. When he died, the local people “praised him”.³⁵ Garret remarks, however, on the “rebellious stirrings among Melanesian missionaries brought in from the Queensland cane fields”.³⁶ These Melanesians had become Christians in Australia, but had received little schooling.³⁷ Raeburn Lange, in his book on indigenous missionaries of the South Pacific, wonders if it would have been better to bring in trained Anglican teachers from the Melanesian Mission.³⁸

The European-descent missionaries recognised the evangelistic zeal of the Melanesian missionaries, but believed that, during the “pioneering stage of the mission”, the Melanesians could “never be more than valuable helpers”.³⁹ Although they recognised that the church should eventually have its own indigenous ministry.

MONTAGU STONE-WIGG: FIRST BISHOP OF NEW GUINEA

Montagu Stone-Wigg, a non-evangelical, was appointed as the first Bishop of New Guinea in 1897.⁴⁰ At his consecration, Stone-Wigg talked of making the New Guinea Anglican church a native, self-supporting church, operated by New Guineans.⁴¹ The first Papuan Anglican priest, Peter Rautamara, was ordained in 1917.⁴² Stone-Wigg had a positive attitude

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ John Garrett, *Footsteps in the Sea: Christianity in Oceania to World War II* (Suva Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1992), p. 58.

³⁷ Raeburn Lange, *Island Ministers: Indigenous Leadership in Nineteenth-Century Pacific Islands Christianity* (Christchurch NZ: Macmillian Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, 2005), p. 309.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 310.

⁴⁰ Theo Arts, “Romans and Anglicans in Papua New Guinea”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 7-1&2 (1991), p. 17.

⁴¹ Lange, *Island Ministers*, p. 311.

⁴² Garrett, *To Live Among the Stars*, p. 249.

towards the New Guineans, viewing them “not as savages, sunk in satanic darkness, but appealing children of God”.⁴³ He favoured liturgy and the sacraments, and imposed them on the fledgling Anglican church in New Guinea. The ethos of the mission seemed to be:

[T]hat, if the gospel and the church, in what was believed to be restored Catholic fullness, could take root in Papua tribes, the overlaid *anima naturaliter christiana*, some spark of latent grace in primitives, would be re-illuminated by the operation of catechism and the sacraments; grace would elevate and redeem the unsophisticated nature.⁴⁴

In 1907, *Mankind and the Church: Being an Attempt to Estimate the Contribution of Great Races to the Fullness of the Church of God* was published, to which Stone-Wigg contributed. The publication offers further insight into how Stone-Wigg understood the gospel’s relationship to culture. He recognised that traditional beliefs included the strong belief in spiritual powers, the manipulation of those spiritual powers, through rituals, and the passage into the next world at death.⁴⁵ Stone-Wigg’s attitude towards traditional religion is enlightening:

What basis is here for the building up of the Christian faith and the Christian life! True, weeds and nettles have grown round and into the foundation; there is much to be cut and cleared away. The stones will need to be reset. But a preparation there has been. The nature has been taught to look out beyond itself. It has learned deeply the

⁴³ Ibid., p. 248.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 246.

⁴⁵ M. J. Stone-Wigg, “The Papuans, a People of the South Pacific”, in *Mankind and the Church: Being an Attempt to estimate the Contribution of Great Races to the Fullness of the Church of God*, H. H. Montgomery, ed., (London UK: Longmans, Green & Co, 1907), pp. 34-35. <<http://anglicanhistory.org/aus/hhmontgomery/mankind1907/stone-wigg02.html>> July 30, 2009. Stone-Wigg noted that it took 14 years before missionaries began to understand traditional beliefs.

great principle of superhuman aid and the truth, when at length presented, finds something in the native heart, on which to build.⁴⁶

For Stone-Wigg, it was important that the New Guineans understood the Apostles' Creed, saying, "It is has been the instrument in the Holy Spirit's hands to rescue them from untold ignorance and degradation."⁴⁷ However, he believed that the New Guineans already exhibited many aspects of the "Perfect Life", such as gentleness, unselfishness, patience, and a good temper. According to Stone-Wigg, the "white race" could learn much from the New Guinean.⁴⁸ Regarding conversion, Stone-Wigg was not concerned with saving souls, because Melanesians were not necessarily fallen; rather, he believed the Anglican Melanesian church – by practising a consecrated village life – could be an example of what the true church should look like.⁴⁹

CONCLUSION

The story of the Anglican church's march towards Papua New Guinea is one of mixed success and learning experiences. Selwyn's extraction method of training – training Melanesians in a foreign culture – proved unsuccessful; however, his missionary vision influenced his successors to eventually establish the Anglican church in parts of western Melanesia. Patteson's principle of accommodation – that Christianity should be adapted into cultures – was in contrast to the traditional missionary thinking of the day, but proved to lay the groundwork for future Anglican missionary thinking on culture and the gospel. Codrington's in-depth study of culture and language, combined with his view of conversion – changes in people's way of life – exemplified the Melanesian Mission's

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 36-37.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 61-62.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 68-69.

⁴⁹ David Wetherell, *Reluctant Mission: The Anglican Church in Papua New Guinea 1891-1942* (St Lucia Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1977), p. 135.

enculturation emphasis. Of course, enculturation had its Anglican limits, as in the required use of the liturgical Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*. King's skill in preaching contextualised Bible stories was due to his diligence at learning local languages and customs. He was an evangelical among Anglo-Catholics in the New Guinea mission, emphasising true conversion before baptism. The Melanesian missionaries' abilities to communicate the gospel more quickly than their European-descent, co-missionaries happened, despite their limited formal education. Stone-Wigg viewed God as already in the Melanesian culture, but to reach Him required Anglican methods: liturgy, sacraments, and the Apostles' Creed.

Perhaps there is no better way to encapsulate the Anglican church's effort at contextualising the gospel for the people of Melanesia than by Garrett's biographical comments on Sir John Guise – an Anglican – and the first Governor General of Papua New Guinea. Garrett states, "His biographical data show how Anglican Christianity in Papua, and later New Guinea, as a whole, could facilitate authentic *via media*, a pathway between cultures, while affirming both local identity and a Christian faith, with claims to catholic breath."⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Garrett, *To Live Among the Stars*, p. 252.

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TATAPA: CHRIST THE PROTECTOR

Ezekiel Ivihi

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INTRODUCTION

Tribal fights have been common in Papua New Guinea, although the strategy and weapons vary across the nation. There are common enemies, however, that all tribes in Papua New Guinea have fought. Those common enemies are evil spirits. The people of Teop, in North Bougainville Province of Papua New Guinea, fought the battle with *tatapa*.

TATAPA

Tatapa is a practice that has been historically used by the Teop people to protect themselves against attack from evil spirits.¹ *Tatapa* was used to ward off evil spirits, so that they could not enter villages to attack. People knew that they could not kill or eliminate these spirits; all they could do was use *tatapa* to repel the evil spirits. The practice of *tatapa* was believed to serve as an invisible protective shield, or hedge, around the whole village.

The practice of *tatapa* involved two materials. The first was a stick, two centimetres in diameter, and 20 centimetres in length, made from a special tree – *toras*, which was strong in nature, and sacred in use.² The second was a reddish fruit, with a hairy body, containing red seeds inside – these were the ones commonly used in many parts of Papua New Guinea during sing-sing ceremonies to paint participants' faces. In order to protect the village, the practitioner would prepare several sticks by making them sharp on one end and rounded on the other.

¹ *Tatapa*, does not destroy evil spirits; rather, it keeps them at bay.

² Only the *tatapa* practitioners knew the location of the *toras* trees. One must assume that the tree had some spiritual power associated with it.

The number of stakes depended on the size of the village. The stakes were planted, evenly spaced, on the circumference of the village, which created a powerful invisible wall, or hedge, that stopped the evil spirits from entering the village. The practitioner would use both hands to drive the stakes into the ground in specific locations – the rounded end of the stakes remaining above ground. He then took dry powder that had been stored in a coconut shell – *guvi* – which had been specially prepared to keep the powder dry.³ While rubbing the rounded end of the stake with the reddish powder, the practitioner would recite a chant or a prayer – *ananava* – calling the spirits of the ancestors, who had been strong warriors, to come and drive away the evil spirits.⁴

It was believed that, when these stakes were planted, the special powder applied, and a special chant said over them, then an invisible wall of power was created that repelled the evil spirits from entering the village. The belief was that invisible rays of power spread out along the edge of the village for about ten metres from each stake. The stakes had to be driven into the ground just as night began. Traditionally, the time was indicated by the *atoto* – fireflies – because people believed that evil spirits travelled through these fireflies.⁵ All the people of the village had to make sure to return to the village before dusk, at which time, the stakes were driven into the ground. If the people failed to return by dark, the belief was they would be caught and killed by the evil spirits, which hovered around the village trying to get in.

CHRIST AS *TATAPA* THE PROTECTOR

For Christians today, the *tatapa* represents Jesus as protector. Jesus is the one who protects against evil. He is the refuge that Christians can run into

³ *Guvi* is a whole and dry coconut shell, specially carved with an opening in the shape of a mouth that is located below two eyes. The *guvi* is used to store traditional items, such as beads (used for bride price), or water, but mostly dried-out, red, fruit seeds.

⁴ *Ananava* is the chant or prayer to the spirits of the ancestors, recited by the practitioner of the *tatapa*, in which he calls on the dead spirits of the ancestors, who were known to have been well respected and feared by the community for their warring achievements.

⁵ *Atoto* are flying insects that come out in number during the evening, and fly randomly around. According to the Teop people, these fireflies were the means of transport for both evil and good spirits.

for safety – “but you are my strong refuge” (Ps 71:7; 91:2, 4). Christ is the fortress, a Christian’s stronghold – “O Lord, my strength and my fortress” (Jer 16:19; Ps 91:2). He is the shield against Satan’s fiery arrows – “take up the shield of faith” (Eph 6:16; Ps 91:4). Christ is the hedge that surrounds believers – “Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has?” (Job 1:10).

Believers know that Satan comes to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10), but God places a hedge of protection around His people, to shield them from Satan’s attacks. The hedge is like a spiritual wall-of-fire surrounding God’s faithful, so that Satan cannot harm them – “And I myself will be a wall of fire around it [Jerusalem] declares the Lord” (Zech 2:5). Therefore, believers have this wall of protection around them.

The protective power of the rays of the stakes, which cover the village like a “no-go zone”, represent Christ’s protective righteousness – “deliver me in your righteousness” (Ps 31:1a).⁶ With Christ’s righteousness, believers are covered with rays of power that brings fear to evil spirits – “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God you won’t torture me” (Mark 5:7). God has given Christians divine power through His mighty armour to stand against the attack of evil spirits (Eph 6:13-17). Christians cannot eliminate evil spirits; nevertheless, God will punish evil spirits in the fiery furnace, with their master, Satan – “their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur” (Rev 21:8).

For Teop Christians in the North Bougainville Province, Christ is their tatapa – their protector.

⁶ A “no-go zone” is a military term that refers to a strip of land, into which opposing parties do not venture, lest the enemy kill them.

DEATHS CAUSED BY SORCERY: A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

Alu Aluvula

This article was Alu's Bachelor of Theology thesis at the Christian Leaders' Training College in Papua New Guinea.

INTRODUCTION

Sorcery plays a major role in animistic, traditional societies. Melanesians are born into this tradition, which shapes and forms their way of life, and belief systems. The arrival of the gospel on our shores was a major breakthrough. However, many Christians, who have long held these traditional belief systems, find it very difficult to part with them. One reason for this is that they simply have not allowed their traditional worldviews, rooted deep within them, to be replaced with the truth of the gospel message.¹

Melanesian Christians continue to live in fear of sorcery. This thesis will offer the way forward to eliminating this fear, and replacing it with scriptural truth. It will examine what the Bible says about overcoming fear in relation to sorcery, and, more importantly, will contextualise the biblical message in combating fear, in terms of the victory we all have in Christ.

THE TRADITION OF SORCERY IN MELANESIA: THE HULA PERSPECTIVE

Among the Hula people,² if a child dies of pneumonia, the parents do not ask how and why. They will not blame themselves for being careless, or the child for being foolish. They will go to their magician to ascertain the cause of the illness. They will ask if the child has been bewitched, and by whom. If not, they will ask if one of the spirits has been offended, and

¹ Michele Stephen, *Sorcery and Witchcraft in Melanesia* (Melbourne Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1987), p. 121.

² The Hula people are located in the Central Province of Papua New Guinea.

what must be done to appease it. They know that, unless harmony with the spiritual forces is restored, death will inevitably result. However, more and more deaths are now occurring through sorcery, because people are purposely paying sorcerers to kill someone.³

Although the gospel has penetrated through some of the strongholds of animistic beliefs, such as ancestral worship, the fear of spirits is still a major issue. In December, 2008, three deaths occurred in Hula. First, was a young girl, then a middle-aged man, followed by a middle-aged woman. All deaths these days are blamed, first of all, on the sorcerer.⁴ Why? They are blamed on the sorcerer, because all of the deceased were in excellent health, and died suddenly. This suggests the intervention of an evil spirit at work.⁵ In the past, it was believed that, if someone died without a good reason, he had, in some way, made the spirits angry. However, today, it is believed that deaths through sorcery result from many reasons, such as, jealousy, payback, a power struggle, adultery, and wealth.

Many sorcerers use their power to cause sickness, misfortune, and death.⁶ In other societies, and abroad, there are specialised sorcerers, who practise as individuals, and can be hired to use their power against their enemies.⁷ According to Vuirakava Alu, the hiring of sorcerers is quite common in Hula. Many others, interviewed by the author, also agreed.⁸

So then, what is sorcery? It is using harmful substances, or objects, which have the power to kill people. This power to kill depends on the sorcerer's ability to control the powers to which he has access.⁹ He might mix leaves, tree bark, sticks, or excrement into a mixture and subject it to magic, for the

³ Joseph A. Taruna, "God's Power Exceeds Melanesian Power" (BTh thesis, Christian Leaders' Training College, Banz, 1980), p. 4.

⁴ Ai Noka, Hula village councillor, interview by author, Hula village, January 2, 2009.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Taruna, "Gods Power Exceeds Melanesian Power", p. 4.

⁷ Pamela J. Stewart, Andrew Strathern, *Witchcraft, Sorcery, Rumours, and Gossip* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 125.

⁸ Vuirakava Alu, SDA Women's Group, interview by author, Hula village, January 11, 2009.

⁹ G. W. Trompf, *Melanesian Religion* (Port Moresby PNG: UPNG Press, 1980), p. 89.

victims to die. Yet, it is important to note that the only time these objects become fatal is when they are related to supernatural evil powers.¹⁰ And, whether the people know this or not, they are crippled by the fear of sorcery and death.

A Hula man said that sorcerers woke up his father one night, some years ago, and led to the pit toilet outside his house. There, he was badly beaten until he was unconscious. He had his head, and the insides of his stomach, smashed, and excreta shoved down his throat. He was then brought back to consciousness, and walked back into his house without showing any signs of what had happened to him.¹¹

A group of sorcerers working together for evil are called “*Sangumas*”. They are men with special powers that can make themselves invisible. They can travel long distances mysteriously in a few minutes. Sometimes, they turn into animals to perform supernatural feats, or turn into beautiful girls to seduce men. It is believed that, originally, the main *sanguma* areas in PNG were the Sepik Province, Madang, and the Papuan Islands. It is believed that *sanguma* then spread to other places along the coast, like Hula, and into the highlands.¹² Today, stories of sorcery and *sanguma* are heard throughout PNG, with the question being asked as to who has the most powerful form of sorcery. Is it possessed by the Sepiks, the highlanders, the Papuans, or the Islanders?

Secondly, their attack is personal and immediate, and the person being attacked has no power to defend himself. The assailants spring on their victim from an ambush, brutally overpower him, and jab poisons directly into his body.¹³ However, there have been some instances where *sanguma* has been overpowered. One Hula man was attacked, but managed to fight

¹⁰ R. Freund, R. Hett, and K. Reko, *Religion in Melanesia Part C* (Port Moresby PNG: UPNG Press, 1970), p. 72.

¹¹ Roland Kepo, United church member, interview by author, Hula village, January 9, 2009.

¹² Trompf, *Melanesian Religion*, p. 92.

¹³ Taruna, “God’s Power Exceeds Melanesian Power”, p. 5.

his *sanguma* attackers off. He subsequently fell sick for two weeks, but recovered. In this instance, the *sangumas* only caused sickness, not death.¹⁴

Village court magistrate, Gima Kana, who has presided over many cases of sorcery, says that the *sangumas* (or *waras*, as they are called in Hula) have a group network. One *sanguma* man specialises in calling out the victim from his sleep through a dream; a second attacks, and knocks his victim out; the third beats him to death; while another feeds him poisons. The last of the *sanguma* men has the power to wake up his victim, heal the outside of his wounds, and send him back into his house.¹⁵ However, not all groups operate in such numbers; some have more than one of the powers described above.

Kepo tells how his father died as a result of *sanguma*, with death occurring two days after he was attacked. His body showed signs of being badly beaten. Usually, a dark black patch appears on either the face or the chest, to prove it was a *sanguma* attack, but medical post-mortems have not always noticed these.¹⁶ The *sanguma* people were also present at his father's funeral, without revealing their identities. Their purpose was to remove poisons from the body, to obtain an increase in power for the next victim. It is also a tradition for the warrior to take back his weapons, as evidence, in case another *sanguma* was hired to find out who the killers were.¹⁷ This scenario, in the PNG highlands, of having the killers present themselves at their victim's funeral is a suicide attempt. It is a common thing in the highlands to torture, and burn alive, sorcerers. However, sorcerers in Hula would not dare present themselves at their victim's funeral, but rather stay away.

The question to be addressed here is: who is responsible for these deaths through sorcery? Although non-Christians and Christians differ on many

¹⁴ Isu Aluvula, chairman, Koke United church, interview by author by telephone, August 8, 2009.

¹⁵ Gima Kana, Hula village court magistrate, interview by author, Hula village, January 13, 2009.

¹⁶ Roland Kepo, Hula villager, interview by author, Hula village, January 9, 2009.

¹⁷ Ibid.

fronts, they both often point the finger towards *sanguma*, as those responsible for the deaths. According to Revd Karo, not only non-Christians, but Christians, too, become very fearful, when a death, suspected to be caused by sorcery, occurs.¹⁸

Kapa believes that the greatest enemy is fear.¹⁹ As one youth pastor put it, "Fear is all over the place, even in the pews, because that's where it starts."²⁰ There has also been much talk recently of church elders being involved in sorcery. The church denies this outright, although substantial evidence has led to some church elders being stood down. The church hierarchy defends its integrity by saying that its leadership and membership have been victimised by the devil and his cronies simply to stop the good work of serving the gospel.²¹

Fear is the main weapon Satan uses to keep people from believing in biblical truths concerning his destiny and his defeat (as a result of Christ's victory on the cross). According to Ezekiel Ivihi,²² for those who believe in sorcery, sickness, death, misfortune, and disasters befall them. However, sorcery, in a community setting, has some positive impacts. Anti-social behaviour is discouraged. It provides the community with an explanation for death, sickness, and misfortune. The weak, the old, and the marginalised can obtain power and respect. It also provides society with a scapegoat for voicing anger.

In the PNG highlands, sorcery is condemned. Negatively, sorcery arouses suspicion among relatives, creates fear in the community, and enables sorcerers to become powerful people. Through fear, people are afraid to go to certain places (a bird's cry may signal bad news), and they choose not to go to certain places at certain times in fear of spirits being present. There is

¹⁸ Revd Walo Karo, United church minister, interview by author in *tok ples*, Hula village, January 8, 2009.

¹⁹ Alu Kapa, chairman, Hula United church, interview by author, Hula village, January 15, 2009.

²⁰ Kila Walo, youth pastor, interview by author, Hula village, January 15, 2009.

²¹ Anonymous United church member, interview by author, Hula village, January 17, 2009.

²² Ezekiel Ivihi, CLTC Principal, Seminar Presentation on Sorcery, CLTC, August 13, 2009.

also a lack of initiative, for fear of jealousy. For example, a man may want to commence a business. If others become jealous of him becoming a successful businessman, it may cost him his life through sorcery.

Sometimes, innocent people are blamed for practising sorcery. False accusation and persecution is the result. The accused are normally the defenceless, the elderly, and the weak, and are mostly females, widows, or mothers with no grown-up children (who may be able to stand by them if accused), outcasts, and often older people, with land and coffee. They have no community support. They are tortured, murdered, and eliminated, and their properties are destroyed, all for Satan's pleasure. These beliefs cause family break-ups, social tension in the community, loss, and a claim of authority and property. (For example, a man may be killed, because he has a big portion of land.) Interestingly, according to media reports, women are accused more than men.

There are also psychological implications from sorcery. Victims, who are blamed for sorcery, live with guilt for the rest of their lives. Their families carry public shame, and the community approves the actions of their accusers. According to case studies from Chimbu Province, the accused are burned alive, thrown into rivers, or over cliffs, suffocated, hung on trees, dragged behind moving vehicles, or burnt with a hot iron. Those involved are the community, the accused, the accusers, and the leaders.²³

The standard of sorcery is shifting, and rising to a new level that is linked to new development. Wealth, money, politics, and modern technology are used in some of the methods of killing. For example, the improvement of telecommunications, through mobile phones, makes it easier for sorcerers to reach their victims.²⁴ One would think that, with more Western influence, the traditional ways of doing things would decline. But sorcery seems to be growing stronger than ever, and is using modern technological development to its advantage. It is amazing that even the educated believe

²³ David Tago, CLTC first-year student, interview by author, CLTC, August 15, 2009.

²⁴ Henry Asgar Kelly, *The Devil, Demonology, and Witchcraft* (New York NY: Doubleday, 1974), p. 57.

in it.²⁵ Doctors are saying to their patients, “*em i sik bilong ples*”, indicating there is no obvious medical diagnosis. People are, therefore, advised to seek a traditional cure.²⁶

How can the problem of sorcery be approached? Especially, amid changing mind-sets, why do church leaders continue to live in fear? Tupuru says that one weakness Christians have is how they pray for sorcery-related cases. They tell the individual that a named person has done this to them. This encourages the belief in sorcery. They say the Spirit of God has told them, but could it be some other spirit?²⁷ Usually, a person with this sort of ability must possess a special gift of discerning. However, often they are not spiritually gifted, but do it for self-gain, and popularity – and people named can be falsely accused. And Satan uses Christians to do this! As long as Satan keeps people fearful, they will always be bound under his control.

A strong belief in spirits is part of everyday Melanesian life. This is the reason why many Melanesian Christians still hold onto their cultural beliefs. For the Westerner, it is like eating cake. You just cannot go without it. Even though many Melanesians have become Christian in their beliefs, they truly are Melanesians by the way they respond, especially, to sorcery. Such fear, in Melanesians, has its roots deep within their being – in speech, thought, and deed. In Hula, many Christians still continue to blame *sanguma*, or the sorcerer, for many deaths, and why should they not do so? This is the Melanesian way of life. In light of this Melanesian overview of death by sorcery, and, in particular, the beliefs of Hula Christians, what does scripture have to say about this real-life Melanesian issue?

²⁵ John Middleton, *Magic Witchcraft and Curing* (Austin TX: University of Texas Press, 1967), p. 34.

²⁶ Sorcery is the cause of illness, but it cannot be medically proven.

²⁷ Samuel Tupuru, CLTC fourth-year student, interview by author, CLTC, August 13, 2009.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD AND THE ROOT OF EVIL

A BIBLICAL VIEW OF SATAN

The Bible says that wicked spirits are under the command of Satan, who is called the ruler of this world (John 12:31). Being evil, the devil is a liar, deceiver, destroyer, murderer, and is in opposition to God.²⁸ Against this dark world, the Bible says that Jesus came, as light, to set man free from the bondage of darkness. On the cross, Jesus broke loose the power of darkness. The coming of Christ on earth confirms to us the defeat of the satanic revolution, which had taken place against God. Corrie Ten Boom warns that the lack of knowledge about these spiritual powers in the world is dangerous.²⁹ Billy Graham also says that he believes in the devil, because of the biblical evidence.³⁰

This world is under the control of the evil one, according to 1 John 5:19. In order for one to understand the New Testament (NT), it is important to realise that Satan is the god of this world. He is the evil one, and his power controls the present evil age (John 5:19).³¹ Scripture teaches of God's indirect control of the ungodly that involves sinful people, evil, cruelty, and injustice.³² That does not mean that God is responsible for all suffering in the world, nor is everything that happens His perfect will.³³ The Bible indicates that, at this present time, the world is not under God's dominion, but rather is in rebellion against His rule, and is enslaved to Satan. It is, therefore, unwise to use the statement "God is in control", in order to free ourselves from the responsibility of battling sin, evil, or spiritual lukewarmness.³⁴

²⁸ John W. Gwilliam, *Significant Religious Beliefs* (Goroka PNG: University of Goroka Press, 1974), p. 3.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *The Full Life Study Bible New International Version* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1992), p. 1984, footnote 1.

³² Luke 13:16; 2 Cor 4:4; Gal 1:4; Eph 6:12; Heb 2:14; Matt 4:10.

³³ Matt 23:37; Luke 13:34; 19:41-46

³⁴ *The Full Life Study Bible*, John 5:19, p. 1984, footnote 1.

On the other hand, there is a sense that God is in control of the ungodly world. God is sovereign, and thus some things happen under His permissive will and oversight, or, at times, through His direct involvement, according to His purpose. Nevertheless, at this time in history, God may have limited His supreme power and rule over the world. But the good news for us, and bad news for Satan, is that God's limited rule is only temporary.³⁵ As is written in scripture, God, in His wisdom, will destroy Satan and all evil, and then the kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ, and He will reign forever and ever.³⁶ However, there is a fine line between God's permissive will and His perfect will, as far as His sovereignty is concerned. For example, in His permissive will, He allowed Satan to test Job, but Job never lost his faith, despite his anger and fury at the situation.³⁷

Natural disasters, such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tidal waves, cyclones, and hurricanes, which result in millions dying, can be described as happenings under the permissive will of God. The current HIV/AIDS epidemic, bird and swine flu, and diseases of all sorts, also claim millions upon millions of lives. Man-made destruction, such as mining exploration, criminal activities, suicide bombers, chemical and nuclear world wars, and sorcery and witchcraft, continue to keep the list of those victimised rising up to the billions. The big question is: where is God in all of this? Can He not intervene? Are the victims responsible for their own deaths? If God gives life, and takes life, how is it that a loving, merciful, gracious Father sends such destruction to end millions of lives? God allowed Satan partial control over Job's life.

In other words, Satan currently has power over all evil, destruction, and suffering, but it will come to an end when God brings His final judgment on the world.³⁸ From God's perspective, Satan lost the battle, when Christ died and rose again from the dead. However, does Satan really believe that he has lost the battle? Could it not be, from the anticipated gathering of his

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Rev 19:20; 11:15.

³⁷ Job 1:2.

³⁸ Rev 16:20.

forces for the battle of Armageddon, that Satan might be thinking he could still win?³⁹ Although scripture says that he will be taken captive by the archangel Michael, has Satan chosen not to believe this?⁴⁰

According to scripture, the Devil was once a glorious angel.⁴¹ But, in his arrogance and pride, he rebelled against God, and was cast out of heaven. As a created being, Satan has limited powers. He is not omniscient, omnipotent, or omnipresent. He is trying to turn everyone away from God. In Hula villages, he uses the fear of death, through sorcery, to achieve his purposes.

The battle is the Lord's.⁴² It is no use fighting a battle without Christ, because God has won the battle for all. Through Christ's resurrection, He defeated sin, Satan, and death. Christians, therefore, are able to also defeat death, regardless whether it is from suicide bombings, criminal attacks, HIV/AIDS, or natural disasters. The victory, for Christians, is spiritual. Eventually, though, all believers will be raised with a glorious body.⁴³ Many Christians today are short-sighted. The victory they focus on is the victory for today, because of Satan's present dominion in the world. A Christian's victory for this world needs to be fought out, lived out, and experienced. The Christian, however, must never forget that the ultimate victory is theirs in Christ.

According to scripture, before Christ went back to His Father, He claimed to have been given authority over this universe. He then commanded His disciples to go everywhere to carry on the work He had started in the name of the Trinity.⁴⁴ If these words are true, Christians should have no fear when dealing with other powers, because they are subject to Jesus' authority. Even more comforting is that He has promised to be with

³⁹ Rev 16:14-16.

⁴⁰ Rev 20:2-3.

⁴¹ *NIV Life Application Bible* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1997), p. 10.

⁴² Deut 3:21-22; 2 Chr 20:15.

⁴³ 1 Cor 15:42.

⁴⁴ Matt 28:18-20.

Christians everywhere they go, to ensure Satan is reminded of his defeat on the cross.⁴⁵

However, Melanesian Christians' perspective of protection is not spiritual, but physical. Some Christians carry weapons to defend themselves, in case of trouble. They profess to believe in Christ's protection, but will carry a bush knife in the event of an attack. One pastor (who did not wish to be named) hides a firearm under his pulpit, in case enemy, warring tribes attack. This is a classic example of culture verses the gospel.

When the Bible affirms God as the creator of the universe, it acknowledges Him as sovereign over everything, seen and unseen. Human power operates on the basis of what God has created, and is, therefore, subject to Him. Seeking after other powers is idolatry, because God desires us to worship and honour only Him. On that basis, He warns us not to turn to sorcerers, or witchcraft, and be defiled by them, because God is a holy God, and these things are detestable to Him.⁴⁶

EVIL POWERS – A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

Old Testament

In Old Testament (OT) law, God gave warning and judgment against sorcery. The people of Israel saw God perform miracles to challenge the heathen gods in Egypt. Upon defeating these gods, the Lord made a covenant with Israel that they would worship only Him, and no other gods. He warned them not to turn to sorcery,⁴⁷ or witchcraft,⁴⁸ because they would surely die.⁴⁹ The same principle is seen throughout the OT prophets. They, too, warned the people not to turn to mediums.⁵⁰ But, more importantly, was the call for the sorcerers to turn back to God.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Taruna, "God's Power Exceeds Melanesian Power", p. 22.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Deut 18:9-14.

⁴⁸ Lev 19:26, 31.

⁴⁹ Taruna, "God's Power Exceeds Melanesian Power", p. 24.

⁵⁰ Is 47:9-13.

⁵¹ Is 57:3.

In Melanesia today, many sorcerers are never given the chance to repent. Instead, they are tortured and killed, when found out. This is not a godly approach to the situation. The Bible exhorts all Christians to condemn the wrong they do, but to also call them into repentance. This is a better way to deal with the problem. It causes one to realise that there is a loving, forgiving Father, and He only wants the best for people. However, because of syncretism, this is a hard thing to do.

Furthermore, according to the OT, there were prophets, who saw visions, and practised divination and sorcery, but God warned the people not to listen to them⁵². As His judgment, God punished those who turned to evil practices, to seek guidance and power. King Saul was judged, and died as a result of his consulting the witch at Endor.⁵³ The Northern Kingdom of Israel was judged and punished for burning their children, and practising divination, which angered God.⁵⁴ As a consequence, they fell into the hands of the vicious Assyrians. King Manasseh faced judgment, and was taken to Babylon for burning his son, as a result of communing with mediums.⁵⁵ When the Israelites journeyed to Canaan, Balak paid a witchdoctor to put a curse on the people of Israel. However, under God's own protection, Balaam, who was hired to curse Israel, could only bless them.⁵⁶ Finally, when Josiah came to the throne, he restored God's standards of the law.⁵⁷

In Melanesia, as in many parts of the world, the ultimate aim of sorcery and divination, in this modern age, is to make a large profit. During the time of our ancestors, these things were traditional issues. Now, they are economic issues. In fact, it is for financial gain that sorcery and witchcraft have produced so many con men. However, looking at the bigger picture, ultimately, it is Satan's permitted dominion in this world, and his longing

⁵² Jer 27:9.

⁵³ 1 Sam 28:7.

⁵⁴ 2 Kings 18:11.

⁵⁵ 2 Chr 33:11.

⁵⁶ Num 23:21-23.

⁵⁷ 2 Chr 34:31-32.

for people to follow him, instead of God, that these activities continue to occur.

New Testament

In the New Testament (NT), Paul identifies sorcery among the works of the flesh.⁵⁸ John, in Revelation, says sorcery is wickedness, and those involved were called to repent.⁵⁹ Paul met Bar-Jesus, and rebuked him for his plans to stop the Governor, Sergius Paulus, from becoming a Christian.⁶⁰ In Philippi, Paul and Silas crossed paths with a slave girl, whom people used for divination, for their monetary gain. Paul commanded the evil spirit to leave her that instant, and it did.⁶¹

God's view towards sorcery is clear. He hates it, condemns it, and punishes those who will not turn back to Him. However, in nearly all biblical accounts of sorcery, one thing is clear: God loves the sorcerer, and calls upon all Christians to condemn sorcery. But God also calls Christians to try, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to lead the sorcerer to Christ.

Interestingly, God sometimes protects His people, whether it is in His perfect or permissive will. According to Num 23:8, when Balaam was paid to curse the people of Israel, he said what God had intended him to say; he claimed he had no power to do otherwise. However, there are also other examples in scripture, where it seems that God did not protect His people from harm.⁶²

In addition, God has His army of angels to help protect us. They are God's messengers, and His servants to help care for all who receive salvation, to guard, strengthen, and help us in times of oppression and danger.⁶³ God's angel told Philip to go and help the Ethiopian receive Christ.⁶⁴ Another

⁵⁸ Gal 5:18.

⁵⁹ Rev 21:8.

⁶⁰ Acts 13:1-13.

⁶¹ Acts 16:16-18.

⁶² Heb 11:35.

⁶³ Heb 1:14.

⁶⁴ Acts 8:26.

angel told Cornelius to send for Peter to come and talk to him about Jesus.⁶⁵ And, in answer to prayer, an angel led Peter out of prison.⁶⁶ During Jesus' temptations, and at the Garden of Gethsemane, God's angels came to strengthen Him.⁶⁷ However, many Christians want to be autonomous. Satan knows this tendency well, and he used the idea of autonomy to convince Eve to think independently, to be her own boss, and to do whatever she pleased. The end result was disobedience to God – sin.

The Sovereignty of God, in Spite of All Evil

Many Christians expect God to do things the way they want. They would like to manipulate Him, but God will exercise His prerogative to do whatever He pleases with His creation. One of the hardest things that Christians need to know about God is that He can do whatever He wants, because it is all His.⁶⁸ As far as His sovereignty is concerned, it is important for Christians to stop telling God who He is, but rather to allow God to tell them who He is. Christians need to learn to allow God to be God. For example, many people judge each other for their characters. If someone is humble, others find it difficult to see him as an angry person. If someone is generous, he cannot be greedy. If someone is sympathetic, he cannot punish. When people judge others, based on their good character, sometimes, they will use that good character to manipulate the person. They know what other people expect, and so find it hard to act outside of that expectation.

If a death occurs, for which, it seems, God was not responsible for, such as sorcery, they question whether He had no part in it. Was it God's plan for that life to die from sorcery, as a result of disobedience? This is not to imply that God caused it. But, maybe, He allowed it to happen through this means. Should that be so, who can question God for it? To do so would surely question His sovereignty. Christians must allow God to be God, and stop making a fuss, whenever they cannot find satisfactory solutions to deaths such as these.

⁶⁵ Acts 10:22.

⁶⁶ Acts 12:11.

⁶⁷ Matt 4:11; 26:53.

⁶⁸ Ps 24:1.

This calls for patience and perseverance, in times, when such deaths occur, and, most of all, for Christians to have faith, dependence, and trust in God always. If Christians continue to say that God is this, and God is that, then faith, dependence, and trust in Him mean nothing. Faith, dependence, and trust in God mean allowing Him to work in ways that only He knows best. Once Christians start to challenge the sovereignty of God, depending on the nature of situations, and unexplainable events, they judge God by what they see and experience, and do not leave these matters in the realm of faith. Every Christian is commanded by Christ to walk by faith, and not by sight.

If a non-Christian dies of sorcery, can the death be rationalised in some Christian way? Can it be argued that he did not take God's love, through Christ, seriously? Is it wrong to think that he may have been stubborn, and unwilling to repent, and thus faced God's wrath? Yet, if a Christian dies in the same way, should sin be blamed for his death, if Christ has already paid for his sins? Definitely not! So what conclusions may be drawn from the Christian's death?

Taking into consideration the many attributes God has, one would have to say that God is sovereign. He is timeless, while humans are time-limited. Maybe God allowed Satan to orchestrate the death without our knowledge. However, one thing remains: He is sovereign forever, and people just need to keep on living by faith.

Some questions to ask are: Why did God drown Pharaoh's army? Why did David have an affair with Bathsheba? Why did not Moses see the Promised Land? Why did Cain kill Abel? Why was there so much bloodshed and killing between Israel and the Philistines, the Babylonians, Assyrians, and the Romans? Why were the Israelites freed from Egypt, after spending over 400 years there? There may be all sorts of answers to these questions: like sin, disobedience, hardened hearts, the worship of other gods, and pleasurable desires, but, through them all, God revealed His character, His being, His attributes, His personality, and His sovereignty.

If a person dies from sorcery, what attribute may God be choosing to reveal? The answer does not really matter, if it is admitted that, in some way, God is working out His purposes. God said to Moses, "I AM that I

AM”, the Sovereign Lord. As limited human beings, we cannot always understand God’s ways.⁶⁹ Just moments after Peter professed Christ to be his Lord, Christ amazingly rebuked him, and said, “Away from me, Satan.”⁷⁰ This rebuke must have shocked and devastated Peter. According to Christ, Satan, through Peter, was dampening God’s purposes for Him. Jesus rebuked the devilish thoughts Peter had that instant.

In view of this, Christians need to be reminded that, sometimes, death through sorcery may not be the most comfortable way of dying, but the question to ask is: was the death of Jesus a comfortable one, such that we all would like to die like Him? Maybe not, according to our human thoughts, but His very uncomfortable death served God’s purposes, and thus saves all who believe. Peter tried to comfort Jesus, by pulling Him aside, and telling Him that he will never go through suffering. Jesus realised Satan’s plot to confuse Peter, and rebuked him immediately. Christians must be careful not to ignore deaths through sorcery, because they could be leaving God out of His own foreknowledge.⁷¹

On the whole, it is important for Christians to remember that they operate in a world in which God has ultimate control, by causing (perfect will), or by allowing (permissive will), all that takes place. Scripture does not deny that Satan is in partial control of the world today, but only because God allows it. Proof of this is found in Rev 16 and 20. If Satan is in total control, then why do we still exist? Why has this world not come to an end? Can Satan ever destroy what God has created? Even if he takes physical life, can he really still be in control of those who go to heaven or hell? Why cannot he save those who are now in hell, given that they worshipped him while they were alive? He certainly cannot touch those Christ has saved, who are now enjoying the blessings of heaven. The difference between God’s sovereignty over the universe and Satan’s rule now on earth is that Satan’s is temporary, whereas God’s is eternal.

⁶⁹ Perhaps, by one death through sorcery, God could be sparing hundreds of lives.

⁷⁰ Matt 16:23.

⁷¹ Acts 2:23.

Can we now say that Satan is responsible for all evil? Yes, because he is the evil one, and also plays his part in the sins of the flesh, and the system of the world. In fact, to reject the thought that Satan is in control of the world questions the sovereignty of God. According to Prov 16:4, “The Lord has made everything for His own purpose, even the wicked, for the day of evil.” According to Job, whatever God desires, He does. The scriptures affirm He does whatever He pleases.⁷² Isaiah says, “The one, forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being, and creating calamity, I am the Lord who does all these.” The NT does not remain silent, either. Paul says that God works all things after the counsel of His will.⁷³

Is there, then, a scriptural understanding for the prevalence of sorcery? According to Murphree, the fall of nature is roughly the natural consequence of the human fall. Humankind held the natural world as a trust from God. So, when its relationship with God was disrupted, its relationship with the environment became distorted also. The discord between humans and nature reflects the tension that has developed between them and God.⁷⁴ In that light, the idea of harmful spirit activity in Melanesia can be better understood. God’s natural creation is under a curse. Deaths by sorcery, and the natural disasters that claim millions of innocent lives, cry out aloud that this world is in rebellion against God. These things happen, not because a loving Father wills it, but, rather, they are the consequences of man’s sin, and Satan’s dominion in the world.

Pink says that it is only from the word of truth that we can learn about God’s relation to this world.⁷⁵ For Christians in Melanesia, this is a vital element in understanding God. C. S. Lewis argues that the greatest miracle of divine omnipotence, and the greatest testimony to God’s sovereignty, is the fact that God created beings, who possess the power to say “no” to

⁷² Ps 115:31; 35:6.

⁷³ Eph 1:11.

⁷⁴ Jon Tal Murphree, *A Loving God and Suffering World* (Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1973), p. 94.

⁷⁵ A. W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Edinburgh UK: Banner of Truth Trust, 1993), p. 12.

Him. As a result, we are not forced to worship Him, but, rather, will worship Him out of our own free will.⁷⁶

Rom 8:20 speaks of God subjecting His creation to frustration, bondage, and decay. He has, therefore, chosen to exercise His power in this way, and not exercise all the power that He could have. Sadly, in Melanesia, the idea of a power struggle is the way in which people see life and its happenings. If God cannot, in His power, seemingly do anything to stop the forces of evil, then fear remains in a Hula believer, because he has not seen God's power manifested. He lacks the understanding of the sovereignty of God in this regard. Therefore, Christians must always remember that, when someone dies as a result of sorcery, it is never a victory for Satan. Jesus says that evil can hurt the flesh, but never the spirit.⁷⁷ The issue of the sovereignty of God is not about how we see life, but how God sees all that is happening, according to His planning and good pleasure. It is never about us, it is all about Him.

In terms of using scripture to overcome death through sorcery, the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, and, particularly, His resurrection, is our assurance that we need not fear death through sorcery. According to Luke 22, Judas, who was one of Christ's 12 disciples, was a key player in the planning of Christ's physical death. It came to pass, and Satan had many believing he was victorious. Christians must realise that Christ's resurrection meant that He defeated death. This means that all who are in Christ at death will be resurrected, too, even if they die at the hands of evil men through sorcery. This is the best example set for us in scripture. The powers of Satan, sin, and death have been overcome, and, because of this, we are victorious in Christ, and have nothing to fear.

THE OUTCOMES OF DEATH THROUGH SORcery, AND HOW IT AFFECTS CHRISTIANS IN HULA

Belief in God is always in tension with practice in tradition. In the case of sorcery, Christians in Hula believe two things: (1) God gives life; but (2)

⁷⁶ Ibid., quoting C. S. Lewis.

⁷⁷ Matt 10:28.

sorcerers take life. From this, an unbeliever may draw the conclusion that God has no part in the taking of one's life. Yet, it is important for any believer to always remember God's omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. He must remain sovereign at all times.⁷⁸ However, it needs to be noted that evangelism is meaningless to a Hula unbeliever, once he realises Satan's dominion in the world. The church's integrity, respect, status, and cause become null and void in the eyes of the unbelieving world.⁷⁹

To say that God is in control of one's death through sorcery, through His permissive will, encourages unbelievers and sorcerers to continue thinking, "If God allows sorcery, then it must be okay." Again, the cause of the gospel becomes pointless to an unbelieving world. So what can be said of the situation? Are Hula Christians naturally responding, as they should, pointing the finger at the sorcerer, as the agent of death, since Satan is in control of the world today? Or is their response derived from their animistic background, and the fear of spirits?

BIBLICAL ISSUES THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED

Due to a lack of Bible teaching, animistic roots are still deep within their thinking, and fear is one of Satan's greatest weapons to maintain a hold on these people. When a person dies as a result of sorcery, be they either Christian or non-Christian, many become fearful.⁸⁰ Many Hula Christians are unaware that Satan is in partial control of the world we live in, because God has allowed this to happen. Many Christians believe that God is a loving, merciful, gracious Father, and that violent deaths, as such, are not of Him. Thus, a Hula Christian will always point the finger to sorcery, as the cause of death. It is believed that Satan is using this strategy to confuse the Christian's mind, and will do anything to maintain his opposition to God and His people.

⁷⁸ Seik Pitoi, CLTC student, and United church pastor, interview by author, CLTC, July 24, 2009.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Revd Mari Kila, United church minister of Koudeurika and Redscar circuits, interview by author, January 29, 2009.

The suggestion here would be to point people back to scripture. A good passage to commence with could be 1 John 5:19, “that the whole world is under the control of the evil one”. However, Christians must come to understand that God’s self-limitation of His control over this world is only temporary – until Satan and his cohorts are finally destroyed.

If Christians respond, “Well, if the Bible states that Satan is in control of the world I am living in, there has got to be an explanation”, it would be a good idea to bring out God’s purposes, and, in particular, His sovereignty. The story of Job may be one to share, and explain God’s part in allowing Satan to take partial (that is restricted) control of Job’s life.⁸¹

It is very important to make Hula Christians understand the place of the sovereignty of God in such circumstances. This would reduce the level of fear. It is essential to keep one step ahead of Satan, stand on the truth of scripture, and be guided by the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, to have the upper hand in these situations, declare that Satan’s rule is only temporary. He is fighting a losing battle. Satan lost when Christ died and rose from death, but he still continues his strong opposition to God, and God’s people. The next step is to give further evidence from Rev 16-20 that Satan is heading towards destruction. Christians and non-Christians alike should be made aware of God’s coming triumphs, as told in Rev 16 and 20, which biblically confirm Satan’s destiny. These passages explain God’s sovereign rule and power. On the one hand, Satan is in control, but on the other hand, it is only temporary, because the fact is he faces doom for all eternity.

Prov 16:4 would be a good passage for Hula Christians to ponder on, “The Lord has made everything for His own purpose, even the wicked, for the day of evil.” This verse sheds light on unanswered questions that many Hula Christians may ask. It helps to explain why Satan, and the forces of darkness, are at work in the lives of people. Thus, their thinking, at the times when deaths occur through sorcery, will not be based on fear, but on biblical truth.⁸² This strategy is aimed at helping Hula Christians to

⁸¹ Job 1-42.

⁸² Tony Evans, *Our God is Awesome* (Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1994), p. 91.

eliminate fear, and to know, and believe, through scripture, the truth about sorcery, its roots, its worth, and its destiny.⁸³

CONTEXTUALISATION

The Word of God

It would also be very helpful for Hula Christians to understand the differences in Melanesian evil powers, and what they use to enforce their power. Magicians use gingers, pieces of clothing, human waste, bone, herbs, leaves, tree barks, and all kinds of mixtures, through which their power is transmitted. At other times, for *sanguma*, or witches, the people become mediums of power, through rituals and initiation ceremonies.⁸⁴

The use of these animistic powers can be compared, similarly, to the uses of God's vessels of power, in the context of scripture. In contrast to the power of sorcery, the power of God is far different, and incomparable with any other power. It is in His Word, and the name and the blood, of Jesus, with which Christians are equipped to overcome the devil. God created all of creation through His Word – the Word existing before the beginning of all things. The Word of God is not one of the created things, nor was it part of the world which came to being. It was with God for all eternity.⁸⁵ For a Melanesian to better understand Christ, as being the very Word of God, is easy. Sorcerers not only use objects and words, but are also, themselves, vessels that carry out the work of the evil one. Christ is the vessel of God, and so are all Christians.⁸⁶

While God's power rests on His Word, which is the basis for the whole of creation, the man who practises evil powers, uses God's created things, which are powerless in God's eyes, because His Word still remains the source of all powers. A biblical example is when Jesus cast spirits out of demon-possessed people, by speaking words each time.⁸⁷ When Satan

⁸³ Havea, Sione, Amanaki, R. B Johnson, Josaia Rayawa, Djiniyini Gondara, Fotama Vamarasi, *South Pacific Theology* (Oxford UK: Regnum Books, 1987), p. 45.

⁸⁴ Taruna, "God's Power Exceeds Melanesian Power", p. 27.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ 1 John 4:4.

⁸⁷ Matt 8:16.

came to Jesus in the desert, Jesus resisted him by repeatedly quoting scripture, “It is written . . .”.⁸⁸ When Paul was sharing the Word with Governor Paulus, the devil hated it, and tried to hinder him.⁸⁹ The Word is a double-edged sword that cuts through the root of evil.⁹⁰

Along with the various forms of sorcery, words also have power. Those who practise such magic usually utter words, based on knowledge passed down from their ancestors. These words are very powerful, for either for blessing or cursing, depending on the situation. Likewise, if Melanesian Christians in Hula have this same kind of fear for God and His Word, and believe that every word of scripture also has power and authority, in the same way they believe the words of their ancestors are powerful, Satan and his army stand no chance of continuing to put more fear into Christians. This is one way of eliminating fear of animistic spirits. There is a replacement of allegiance. The Word of God fills the gap of the word of animism.⁹¹

One of the biggest problems that Christians have is being unable to replace their existing worldview, which is so deeply rooted within them. The replacement worldview needs to be contextualised, if it is to be understood by the person willing to make the change. The key thing is to fill in the missing gaps. If that is not done, the chances are the old values and habits will remain. This is a general idea that can be used in any culture. Hula Christians will continue to battle with the fear of spirits unless they replace it with a reverential fear of God.⁹² This kind of fear is honouring to Him, giving Him glory, praise, thanks, acknowledging His sovereignty, and revering Him for who He is. It also means giving no allegiance to any other god but Him (Ex 20:3). As Christians, they need not fear the

⁸⁸ Matt 4:4, 7, 10.

⁸⁹ Acts 13:8.

⁹⁰ Heb 4:12.

⁹¹ Dr Kofi Anane, Lecturer in Physics, interview by author, CLTC, March 17, 2009.

⁹² Philip Manuao, “Communicating the Gospel in Meaningful Cultural Forms in Melanesia”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology*, 16-1 (2000), p. 69.

Melanesian spirit gods, because Christ's death and resurrection has set them free from all powers, rulers, and authorities (Col 2:15-21).⁹³

The Manifested Word – Christ

John says that the Word, through which the whole creation came to being, became flesh, in the person of Jesus Christ.⁹⁴ When He died on the cross, He stripped Satan of his power, making the cross our reference for victory. From the cross, we have two other things available to us with which to knock down the powers of evil, and Satan himself.

His Blood. Firstly, it was by the blood of Christ, and the word of their testimony, the saints overcame Satan, as martyrs of the early church. The place of safety for Christians is being in the shelter of His blood.⁹⁵ In that holy moment, when Jesus was shedding His blood, it looked like Satan was victorious. But, when Jesus rose again from the dead, it was a great testimony for His followers to preach about. But it was also a devastating defeat for Satan.⁹⁶ However, Satan uses many people to think that Christ was defeated, and that He never rose again. It was for this reason that Paul persecuted Christians.

To shed blood in Melanesia is a very common thing. Firstly, blood shed through revenge is not a new thing to the Melanesian way of life. In the PNG highlands, shedding blood, or tribal fighting, is a way of life. It, more or less, brings the community together, and encourages compensation, which often leads to reconciliation between two warring tribes. In coastal areas, as in Hula, animals were slaughtered, and offered to spirit gods, to receive blessings, or to put one right with the spirit world. This brought peace and harmony between the spirits and the people. But, most importantly, it removed the fear within the people, so that they could be free of the spirits' curses. Likewise, the blood of Christ, if shared in this context, would be very powerful. Satan never wants to be reminded of the

⁹³ Penuel Ben Idusulia, "Biblical sacrifice through Melanesian eyes", in John D'Arcy May, ed., *Living Theology in Melanesia*, Point 8 (1985), p. 297.

⁹⁴ John 1:14.

⁹⁵ Taruna, "God's Power Exceeds Melanesian Power", p. 32.

⁹⁶ Paul E. Little, *Know What You Believe* (Wheaton IL: Victor Books, 1981), p. 23.

blood of Christ, because it signifies his defeat. If the Hula Christians can do the same, Satan will flee from them, thus removing the fear from within them.

His Name. Secondly, the scriptures show that the name of Jesus was used for victory over Satan's power. To understand the power in the name of Jesus, we need to understand its meaning. It implies His divinity, authority, and His death, through which He won victory, His power to forgive sins, His power to save, His resurrection power, His sovereignty, and the rule that He exercises from on high. When we call on the name of Jesus, we acknowledge all these aspects of His power. And when we do that in faith, He transmits His power to effect what we want for His glory.⁹⁷

Melanesians believe that, in naming someone after places, ancestors, or others, it often carries with it a characteristic. In Hula, if an uncle gives his name to his nephew, the nephew is seen to possess certain characteristics of his uncle. If one is named after a place, usually that place becomes his home. His gardens and land will always provide good food for him. However, if someone comes from another place, and resides there, he will not be as prosperous.⁹⁸

Names have a huge effect on Melanesians, and, usually, the name of a person makes them out to be whatever the background of that name carries. At conversion, Melanesians carry the name "Christian". All Christians are named after Christ. They are His namesakes. Given the description of that name, Hula Christians ought to be proud. They are supposed to take after their namesake, Christ, who possesses all the attributes of God. One such attribute is authority. Christians have all authority over the powers of evil, because Christ has defeated sin, Satan, and death, and He is above all powers, ruling with authority and power. Nothing stands in comparison to the superiority of Christ. He has the highest standing in the entire universe, and Christians, for that matter, stand with Him.

⁹⁷ Taruna, "God's Power Exceeds Melanesian Power", p. 32.

⁹⁸ Veva Vele, Hula community police law and order, interview by author, Hula village, January 17, 2009.

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit also has a very important part to play, with these two weapons that Jesus has given to us from the cross. The Holy Spirit is the witness of the name and the blood of Jesus. He is also the witness of Satan's defeat on the cross. So, when Satan stands against us as an accuser, indicting us of our sins, the Holy Spirit rebukes him, and reminds him of Jesus, and His blood on the cross.⁹⁹ Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would guide us into all the truth.¹⁰⁰

In Melanesian animism, evil spirits control the way of life. For Melanesian Christians, the Holy Spirit is meant to control and guide them. He gives them power to overcome Satan's temptations.¹⁰¹ The Holy Spirit also helps to overcome the struggles Christians have in their lives, by constantly reminding them of their victory in Christ, while, at the same time, constantly reminding Satan of his defeat.¹⁰²

Anderson affirms that it is traditional for Melanesians to orally pass down to generations the ways and practices of cultural beliefs. Sitting around a campfire at night, an elder, "with a big-man mentality", surrounded by a group of youths, may talk for hours on how the spirits are meant to be treated and respected. In this way, Satan uses his "big man" status to cause the younger generations to do four things: (i) lift up Satan's name; (ii) strengthen their beliefs in spirits; (iii) increase the fear that already exists within themselves; and (iv), most importantly, make the younger generation become even more fearful than the previous one.¹⁰³

Anderson believes the challenge to contemporary Christian Melanesians is to share with their children about the present, living Christ, and the message of their salvation. In turn, this also does four things: (i) lifts up the name of God; (ii) strengthens their belief in Christianity, and helps them to

⁹⁹ 1 John 3:8; 5:6-8.

¹⁰⁰ Caspar To Vaninara, "Melanesian stepping stones for the preaching of the kingdom", in John D'Arcy May, ed., *Living Theology in Melanesia, Point 8* (1985), p. 146.

¹⁰¹ Luke 10:19.

¹⁰² Taruna, "God's Power Exceeds Melanesian Power", p. 33.

¹⁰³ Dan Anderson, CLTC lecturer, interview by author, CLTC, August 16, 2009.

grow; (iii) decreases fear in spirits, and increases fear for God; and (iv) it changes the mind-sets of the younger generations.¹⁰⁴ The mind-set of the present generation can never be changed, unless this is done in the power of the gospel message. Otherwise mind-sets will not be changed; not even by advanced technology, money, business, or even politics.

Why did Judas betray Jesus? Scripture says he was a thief.¹⁰⁵ Many sorcerers today are thieves. Satan used Judas to plot the death of Jesus. Judas was driven by the motive of becoming rich, just like many Hula sorcerers are today.¹⁰⁶ Even though King David predicted the outcome of Judas life,¹⁰⁷ Judas chose to reject Christ's warnings, in the same way that many sorcerers do today. Judas, like many Hula Christians, professed to know Christ, but, in fact, Judas was a hypocrite. Many Hula churchgoers, who are involved in sorcery, are like Judas.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, as scripture points out, Judas was ready to be the formal accuser in case a trial was called.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, acts of sorcery usually result in innocent people being accused. Finally, Judas' remorse was too little, too late. Even though Judas sinned, Satan maintained the guilt within him as Satan quickly used the priests to show Judas that it was his doing, and that there was no room for forgiveness.¹¹⁰

Sorcerers in Hula are left to live with guilt for the rest of their lives, and die never repenting. Even though God purposely sent His Son to die for our sins, His death was at the hands of the evil one, and man was evidently responsible for His physical crucifixion. Christ died a physical death at the hands of man, which Satan orchestrated. In contextualising this biblical message, from a Melanesian standpoint, Judas was the sorcerer. Satan used him to operate at night, like many of the Hula sorcerers do today. He had

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ John 12:4-6.

¹⁰⁶ Matt 26:14-16.

¹⁰⁷ Ps 69:25; 109:8.

¹⁰⁸ Mark 14:19.

¹⁰⁹ Matt 26:48.

¹¹⁰ Matt 27:4.

greed for money, just as sorcerers make their living today, as paid murderers.

The most amazing fact is that Christ, who was crucified on the cross, rose from the dead: defeating Satan, sin, and death. If God sent Christ for a purpose, and, if Satan unintentionally fulfilled that purpose, God's will was done. Satan may have thought that he was victorious, but, in reality, his victory was actually his defeat, and Christ's seemingly defeat was actually His victory.

The good news for all Christians is Paul's affirmation, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil 1:21). In the light of this, Hula, and other Melanesian Christians, should see deaths through sorcery as victories, rather than defeats. Fear is no longer an issue, because the Christ, who was victorious, now lives in them, thus making them victorious, too. The fear of sorcery, after all, is a physical fear. However, the greatest fear, for every Christian, should be the fear of God and of the judgment, which comes after death. No other fears can compare with this fear. Thus, this fear should cause men to repent, and turn away from sin, and turn to God.

When a death through sorcery occurs in Hula, 1 John 5:19 affirms that Satan is responsible for all evil, because God has granted him worldly rule. But Satan has taken this biblical truth, and used it against Christians. He has kept them from thinking that God has only given him temporary authority, for God's own sovereign purposes. Furthermore, Satan keeps people guessing as to whether Christ has been really victorious on the cross, and whether he has been truly defeated. Satan does not want Christians to know the truth of his fate, because the truth will show them his true destiny. Because Satan wants God's glory for himself, he keeps people in fear, and makes them believe that he is in total control of death. These thoughts by many Christians only elevate Satan, because people then fear his work, and cannot see what God has done for us through Christ.

Even though Christ knew beforehand of Judas' plot, He chose not to oppose him so that God's purposes would be fulfilled. Likewise, Hula Christians must always maintain their trust, dependence, and faith in God, and not in their animistic spirits, passed down to them through the

generations. A change of allegiance from animistic spiritual beliefs to Christ is a step forward in eliminating the fear of spirits. The ultimate aim of Satan is to keep fear in Melanesia, and spirits are his main means of doing this.

For Christians in Hula to eliminate the constant fear of spirits, it is recommended that clear biblical teaching be given on the following topics:

1. how God would want them to deal with sorcery;
2. Satan, his motives, character, and status in the spiritual realm;
3. the sovereignty of God;
4. the root of sin, and the consequences that man and his world now face, at present;
5. Christ's victory on the cross, and
6. victory through the gospel, contextualised for the Hulas. The message must become identifiable, acceptable, life-changing, but, more importantly, it must become a permanent replacement for their animistic traditions.

CONCLUSION

In order for Hula Christians to remove their fear of spirits, it is essential that the need for contextualisation of biblical truths, such as, the Word, Jesus Christ's resurrection, and the Holy Spirit, be properly addressed, so that Melanesian Christians can permanently replace their animistic worldviews with a Christian worldview. Failure to contextualise these teachings will result in a lack of worldview change.

Many Hula Christians still live in fear of sorcery and *sanguma*. Without contextualisation, they will not be able to understand the sovereignty of God and His power. Recognition of Satan is also an important factor in fully understanding the sovereignty of God.

Since Christ has all authority over the universe, Christians should have no fear when dealing with other powers, because these powers are subject to

Jesus' authority. Jesus will be with Christians to ensure Satan is reminded of his defeat on the cross.¹¹¹ However, a Melanesian Christian's perspective of protection is not spiritual, but physical. Yet, to seek power, for protection, or other benefits, for a better life now, apart from God, is idolatry. God wants us to wait upon Him, in patience, faith, and perseverance, because He desires us to worship and honour only Him.

Scripture points out that the body was meant to die, because of the fall in the Garden of Eden. Yet, the good news for all, is that Christ has risen, defeating death, and becoming a remedy for sin. However, in the context of this thesis, it is very important for Melanesian Christians to see the parallel between Judas' wickedness in orchestrating Christ's death and sorcerers' wickedness in causing victims deaths. Even though Satan seemed to be victorious, God was the ultimate victor. Satan's power of death was defeated by God's power of life, and Christ is the living testimony of that, for all Christians.

Those who are in Christ will be resurrected to life, irrespective of death through sorcery, which causes many Hula Christians to remain fearful. This is the power of God, which, through receiving Christ as their Lord and Saviour, they are sealed with His blood, have the written Word on their hearts, and possess the Holy Spirit to remind Satan that he is defeated. Christians are no longer engaged in a physical, but a spiritual battle, one in which they are victorious with the truth, leaving no room for Satan to deceive them any longer with fear.

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¹¹¹ Taruna, "God's Power Exceeds Melanesian Power", p. 22.

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RECONCILIATION IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS: THE RENNELL-BELLONA CONTEXT

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INTRODUCTION

Wherever we find a community – however primitive, however complex – we find more than an association of individuals, each pursuing his own life, and possessing his own ideas. We also find a social pattern, a coherent body of customs and ideas, an integrated unity, or system, in which each element has a definite function in relation to the whole.¹

Fundamental to every form of social organisation is the method of obtaining items essential for human survival. In other words, how do the people of a particular society produce their food, clothing, tools, and, for the sake of this article, constitute the laws they need, in order to live as human beings? These necessary conditions of existence shape the relationship of men and women to each other. With such an understanding, we must ask of every custom, what contribution does it make to the total social life, and to the functioning of the total social system? The system will then serve to regulate the relationship of all the individuals in that society. John Lewis, in his book, *Anthropology Made Simple*, referred to this notion as a "method of survival".

When we think of law, we picture the courtroom, the judge, barristers, solicitors, the jury, impressive-looking law books, and the entire trappings of a modern legal system. However, when we turn to some simple, primal

¹ John Lewis, *Anthropology Made Simple* (Made Simple Books, London UK: W. H. Allen, 1969), p. 75.

authority, we find nothing like that. Are they then without law? Is law something which appears much later in the history of humanity? Let us turn to a community, whose law on reconciliation stands out, and see what microbes of legality we may find in that context, to help us better understand reconciliation.

MUNGABA MA MUNGIKI: RENNELL AND BELLONA ISLANDS²

Rennell and Bellona, two Polynesian outlying islands, about 120 miles south of Guadalcanal, in the Solomon Islands, enjoyed virtual isolation, until the middle of the 1930s, when missionaries attempted to establish Christianity.³ Prior to the Christian missionary entrance, the people of Rennell and Bellona were governed by its oral, traditional customs, which were not without authoritative means of redressing wrongs, and, if necessary, exercising force to do so.

Traditionally, murder demands an equivalent killing. Since this might lead to a disintegration of peace, the community elders intervene to persuade the kinsmen of the murdered man to accept reconciliation. The process is called *tanu manganga*.⁴ The procedure was the only means of reconciliation in the Rennell-Bellona community. However, the procedure was not always followed, despite the sanctity of *tanu manganga*.⁵

Tanu manganga is a process that differs from what Don Richardson elucidates in his book, *Peace Child*. Richardson, in his account of the

² For this section, I'm especially indebted to Revd Geoffrey Saueha, the Gakea tribe chief, and a prominent elder of the Rennell-Bellona South Sea Evangelical church, and Ezekiel Tuhenua of the Ngutuanga Bangitakungu tribe of Bellona Island, with whom careful, standard, sustained exploration of Rennell-Bellona tradition awakened my knowledge of the topic discussed in this piece of work. Their enthusiasm has been contagious. They have made extensive and careful comments on the topic. One could hardly wish for a better informant and elder.

³ Torben Monberg, "Crisis and Mass Conversion on Rennell Island in 1938", in *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 71-2, (1962), pp. 145-150.

⁴ Rennell-Bellona process of reconciliation – written in Bellona dialect – to blacken face with soot (*m.*), as to sue for peace (*hakaiho*), and present offering (*t.*).

⁵ A prime example of this is the story of Mauhongia and Tangitonga, from the Kungangoto tribe of Bellona Island.

honoured treachery, stumbles onto the situation. There was no contextualisation strategy, with the goal of making an explicit explanation of Jesus as the *Peace Child* of God.⁶

The principle of peace that operates in the Rennell-Bellona community is to get the elders of quarrelling factions to try to sort things out. They will invite, as an arbitrator, a neutral elder, with recognised authority. To make reconciliation and peace, it is necessary to secure the intervention of an elder from the wider group, of which both lineages are members.

Reconciliation and peace is, to the people of Rennell, and its neighbouring island of Bellona, a fundamental element in their social and economic life. According to the ethos of the culture, however, each humiliation and disgraceful act perpetrated against oneself, or one's agnatic kin, must be avenged.⁷ Killing has apparently been part of the ancient, traditional Bellonese repertoire of action.⁸ They pride themselves on never forgetting the offences perpetrated against themselves, or their kin. Rolf Kuschel, an Associate Professor in Psychology at the Psychology Laboratory at the University of Copenhagen, beautifully describes the extensive field research on Bellona Island, in the South Pacific, in 1968, 1971-1972, 1977, and 1983. He wrote, "These feelings can be spontaneously activated by any associative connection to the incident in question. Several years may pass before something triggers off vengeance for a previous offence. If an opportunity presents itself, old hatred will instantly flare up again."⁹ As mentioned earlier, reconciliation is a much-needed facet in a society, where conflicts are copious. It is imperative to a society, where conflict, as Kuschel has rightly affirmed, is: "... rarely been limited to individuals".¹⁰ There is a tendency towards a swift implication of many people, other than those who were the direct cause of the fracas.

⁶ As was indicated in his attempt to explain the *tarop* to different communities in Iran Jaya.

⁷ Rolf Kuschel, *Vengeance is Their Reply* (Kinovox Denmark: Danish Research Council for the Humanities, 1988), p. 7.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

However, practically all Rennell-Bellona people below middle age are Christian. How can we account for these remarkable changes? In most cases, it was because of the missionary's aspiration to evangelise these hermit islands. Therefore, the message of reconciliation, which has brought light to the islands, needs to be taught in the light of *tanu manganga*.

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON RECONCILIATION

Finding its context in the social, legal, and religious customs of the ancient world, the metaphor of reconciliation includes the idea of replacing hostility and separation with peace and friendship, setting free from captivity, and being atoned for. Reconciliation is a notion, seen in both the Old Testament and New Testament, where it is expressed in various forms and metaphors.

Reconciliation is the act of restoring peaceful relationships, where there had previously been hostility and alienation. Ordinarily, reconciliation requires the removal of whatever caused the disruption of peace and harmony. This was especially true in the relation of God with humanity. Christ, in His sacrifice, removed the enmity between God and humanity. Throughout history, early church reformers and theologians coined various words and phrases to explain the work of Christ on the cross.

“Atonement” was coined by the English reformer, William Tyndale, in 1526, to translate the Latin term *reconciliatio* (reconciliation). Atonement is often used, especially in 19th-century works of theology, to refer to the salvific consequences of the death of Christ. The phrase “theories of the atonement” is often used to refer to ways of understanding the manner in which the salvation of humanity is possible, through the death and resurrection of Christ.¹¹

McGrath further emphasised the above notion, by stressing that the term “soteriology” (from the Greek: σωτηριά = *sōtēria* = “salvation”) is increasingly used to refer to what was traditionally designated “theories of the atonement”, or “work of Christ”. Soteriology embraces two broad areas

¹¹ Alistair E. McGrath, ed., *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought* (Oxford UK: Blackwell Publishing, 1993), p. 20.

of theology: the question of how salvation is possible (relating it to Jesus Christ); and the question of how salvation itself is to be understood.¹²

The above comments are but a few examples of the task of finding words that adequately explain “reconciliation”. Reconciliation has brought more light to atonement and salvation, a clear indication of its coherence to existing theology, as Martin notes,

The idea of man’s enmity, and God’s provision of peace, man’s bondage to the cosmos and his “flesh” ($\sigma\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi$ = *sarx*), and the divine offer of release and emancipation, man’s estrangement in a disordered world, and all that has been accomplished, to secure his pardon, and a welcome back to God’s family – as well as the universe’s restoration to harmony – all these motifs could well be subsumed under the overarching rubric of “reconciliation”.¹³

We must never divorce reconciliation from atonement, salvation, and redemption.

Before considering both Old Testament and New Testament perceptions on reconciliation, serious reflection should be given to this emblematic question of “why reconciliation?”. Why are men and women in this condition? What is the explanation of man’s condition?

Men and women, as designated in scripture, were rebellious against God, and so, received the strongest reaction from Him – this is commonly called “the wrath of God”. If we are to think of God as a righteous God, we must accept the thought that He vigorously reacts against sin. Paul refers to this notion with these strong words: “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men” (Rom 1:18). After the fall, mankind made many attempts to remedy his failed state; however, every effort failed. The fact that mankind “missed the mark” proves that

¹² Ibid., p. 616.

¹³ Ralph P. Martin, *Reconciliation: A Study of Paul’s Theology* (Atlanta GA: John Knox Press, 1981), p. 80.

only God, who has given us the bench mark, is able to help us through – His provision is adequate.

The stigma of sin presents a somewhat gauche situation for humanity. Mankind's strength, and modern capabilities cannot find a remedy for sin. Jesus teaches us that we are all sinners. He insists that it is a serious matter when we do not reach the standard He lays down. This means that humanity needs some kind of remedy, a therapy that is able to meet this predicament – bringing wholesome solution to humanity's quandary. Christ's work on the cross has done it all for us. Our part in this is to respond to this by way of accepting this perfect reconciliation proposal.

OLD TESTAMENT CONCEPT OF RECONCILIATION

Reconciliation is not a derelict issue in the Bible, rather, it is God's definitive plan for humanity, a motif for salvation that rings throughout the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, *reconciliation* is from the Hebrew word כָּפַר = *kāpar*.¹⁴ *Kāpar* involved the idea of an atonement, or a covering of sin (Lev 6:30; 16:20; Ezek 45:20). In the Old Testament, the word refers to the divinely-appointed "covering" of sin, particularly by the blood of the sacrifice (Lev 8:15; Ezek 45:20). It conveys the intent of the cultic offerings (Lev 8:18; 16:1-34; Ezek 45:15-20) to restore the people's relationship to God.¹⁵ Reconciliation is the restoration of harmonious friendship and fellowship between estranged persons. The tasks of reconciliation in the Old Testament were tasks performed on behalf of the people, through the mediation of the priest, a notion accented, with significant changes, by the author of Hebrews.

NEW TESTAMENT CONCEPT OF RECONCILIATION

The concept of reconciliation, as foretold and portrayed in the Old Testament, is emphasised significantly in the New Testament narratives of Jesus in the gospels.¹⁶ It is also explained by Paul in his epistles, particularly in Eph 2, using the analogy of Jews and Gentiles being created

¹⁴ Henry S. Gehman, *New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. "Reconciliation".

¹⁵ David Noel Freedman, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. "Reconciliation".

into a new people through the process of reconciliation – made available through Jesus Christ.

Volf expresses the work of Christ, “The cross was not a tragic result of the kind of self-denial that underwrites violence, but a predictable end to a life of struggle for God’s peace in a world of violence.”¹⁷ God’s work, and Christ’s achievement, is best described in the word “reconciliation”, a motif limited to Pauline writings (except for Matt 5:24). The notion of reconciliation is concentrated in passages, which employ the verbs *καταλλάσσω* = *katallassō* (to reconcile) and *ἱλάσκομαι* = *hilaskomai* (to expiate).

God’s purpose is spelled out, “having abolished, in His flesh the enmity” (Eph 2:15). Christ sacrificed His body, thus negating the state of war between these two divisions of mankind – Jews and Gentiles. Paul further emphasises that the intention was to reconcile Jews and Gentiles, thus creating “one new man out of the two” (NIV). Our Lord’s reconciling work is viewed in Eph 2 as the crucial factor in connection with the relationship between Jews and Gentiles.

Tanu manganga was intended to do just that in the Rennell-Bellona community. Its objective was to “create one new man out of the two”, thus bringing peace to the communities involved. In the biblical context, reconciliation plays a vital role in God’s eternal plan of salvation. It is the essence of God’s plan of salvation. So, to have a handle on this important aspect, one should bear in mind the significance of the different ways used to communicate the substance of what God has done for us through the death of His only-begotten Son – Jesus Christ, our only Saviour. The Rennell-Bellona concept of reconciliation – *tanu manganga* – in its authentic form, would help convey the essence of valid reconciliation. Its God-ordained purpose is to precondition the minds of the Rennell-Bellona

¹⁶ The prodigal son, which is – as Peter Forsyth puts it – “the culmination of Christ’s grand revelation of God”. Peter T. Forsyth *The Work of Christ* (London UK: Hodder & Stoughton, 1909), p. 106.

¹⁷ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), p. 291.

people, in a culturally significant way, to recognise the importance of reconciliation in a society, where “eye for an eye” is perceived to be a virtue. Given that nuance, reconciliation is crucial to the ongoing function of the church and its future, considering the amount of violence, hatred, and enmity that is evident everywhere in the world today.

In the Rennell-Bellona community, reconciliation is analogous to *tanu manganga*. Bona fide reconciliation does not repudiate the importance of a cultural analogy. As a substitute, the cultural analogy heightened insight into the scriptures and our own cultural heritage, and thus better prepared us to share Christ meaningfully with other members of our society. Within the Rennell-Bellona community, before the arrival of Christianity, killing was part of survival. Yet, in such a situation, there exists a means of making peace that requires both parties to propose for a traditional reconciliation ceremony. This ceremony is called *tanu manganga*.

RECONCILIATION: THE RENNELL-BELLONA CONCEPT

We now turn our attention to the Rennell-Bellona form of reconciliation, which vividly demonstrates biblical reconciliation. To adapt a biblical truth to a non-biblical context, one needs to account for New Testament culture, in order to have a grasp of the original emphasis. The exclusion of biblical culture, and cultural metaphors, is to fall prey to what Kevin J. Vanhoozer beautifully articulated in his discussion on method, called: “interpretative myopia”.¹⁸ In interpretative myopia, one’s interpretation of scripture is constrained by his or her own worldview. The exclusion of the significance of other cultural metaphors will certainly produce “narrow universality”,¹⁹ thus exposing our insensitivity and arrogance towards other cultures.

Christianity is remarkable for the relative ease with which it enters living cultures. In becoming translatable it renders itself compatible with all cultures. It may be welcomed or resisted in its Western garb, but it is not itself uncongenial in other garb. Christianity broke free

¹⁸ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “One Rule to Rule Them All”, in Craig Ott, and Harold A. Netland, eds, *Globalising Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity* (Nottingham UK: Apollos/IVP, 2007), pp. 85-126.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

from its absolutised Judaic frame, and, through a racial pluralism, adopted the Hellenic culture.²⁰

John Hitchen, in his comments under the heading “God’s truth is universally applicable, and can be known in truth in every culture”, further underscores that the Christian message, in terms of mission, “rejoices in a ‘radical pluralism’, in that every culture is equally acceptable to God as the setting in which His truth can be received and obeyed”.²¹

SIGNS OF HOPE

Is there hope? More and more people are asking why Christian theologians, teachers, preachers, missionaries from the “majority world must play by Western Christianity’s rules in order to do theology. The dividing line really is between Western culture and non-Western culture.

From personal experience, growing physically and spiritually in the Rennell-Bellona community, my culture and the church really have no connection. My ancestors were told by missionaries that our culture was unbiblical, and so must never have a place in the new community of faith.²² Therefore, to introduce our culture, identity, and pride into a church context, one has to take the risk of making meticulous articulation. This is because the above has become a stigma and a hindrance, which has persevered through generations. Kwame Bediako’s complaint encapsulates this somewhat-perturbed feeling. “Western theology was, for so long, presented, in all its particulars, as the theology of the church, when, in fact, it was geographically localised, and culturally limited, European and Western, and not universal.”²³

²⁰ John M. Hitchen, “Culture and the Bible – The Question of Contextualisation”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology*, 8-2 (1992), p. 43, quoting from Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1989), p. 50.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

²² Torben Monberg alluded to that in his article “Poetry as Coded Messages: The Kananga of Bellona Island”, in the *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 83-4 (1974), pp. 427-442.

²³ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “One Rule to Rule Them All”, p. 88, quoting a complaint by Kwame Bediako in his book, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2004), p. 115.

For ages, the people of Rennell-Bellona were indoctrinated by the perception that Western culture is biblical, as opposed to their own culture. Torben Monberg, pointing even to revealing contents of poetry, profoundly captures a prime example of the above notion, from an anthropological perspective. “The little coded messages are nowadays considered ‘sinful’ and ‘improper’ by Christians, and, as far as we could ascertain, are no longer composed.”²⁴ *Kananga* is a form of sending coded messages, and as far as Rennell-Bellona people are concerned, it is their form of communication. Therefore, one has to consider that, in illiterate society, poetry plays a vital role in communication, and, more importantly, in preserving tradition. Hitchen mentions his similar experience, in which he was asked by the people of Papua New Guinea (among whom he worked as a missionary) “why we did not teach Proverbs as tools for pre-evangelism in their proverb-rich, orally-literate society”.²⁵ It is obvious that the early missionaries to the church of Rennell-Bellona never considered such a perspective.

It is important to find the right word to allow reconciliation to be communicated, at least with greater emancipation, both traditionally and theologically. We will now discuss the contribution of the *tanu manganga* ritual to the Christian endeavour of pursuing peace through reconciliation. To appreciate the extent of this task, we need to answer two questions in the milieu of this selected ethnic group. What is reconciliation? *Tanu manganga*? In the most frequent use of the word, *tanu manganga* means “finding lasting, peaceful means in a society, where killing is somewhat a practice”.

Why bother contextualising the concept of reconciliation? Hitchen offers a simple answer: “The nature of God’s way of salvation demands it.”²⁶ Many cultural traits serve important functions in the lives of the people. If they are removed, without providing a substitute, the consequences can be tragic. Therefore, this question remains a challenge to the church: how can

²⁴ Monberg; “Poetry as Coded Messages”, p. 428.

²⁵ Hitchen, “Culture and the Bible”, p. 38.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

Christians communicate and embody the gospel message, in terms of such a worldview?

Tanu manganga is a term, used in the Rennell-Bellona community, to express a process employed, when there is enmity between different lineages or families. This is employed, because conflict in the Rennell-Bellona community will rarely be limited to individuals.

Before we look into some details of the concept of *tanu manganga*, we should offer some observations regarding its background. This term currently denotes something more than just a tradition. It is used when there are “death threats”, intimidation, and pressure from prior killings, jealousy, land disputes, and coercion. However, matters that can be solved, do not require something of this magnitude. *Tanu manganga* can only be applied to concrete human situations, such as the above.

The process is exceptionally sensitive. Thus, it calls for proper counselling. Because of conflict, women of both tribes will either initiate, or implement, negotiation, this is called *tuku muna*. In the Rennell-Bellona community, women are ultimately untouched. To kill a woman is an undignified thing for a warrior to do, and, for that reason, a woman has the liberty to walk into enemy territory to initiate reconciliation.

When both tribes concur on the peace proposal, then the venue is sorted. Both tribes will prepare items, with which to compensate each other. The victim’s tribe will first perform the ritual. They will blacken themselves with prepared soot. In the process, they will also, literally, eat charcoal, and blacken themselves. As the perpetrator’s side arrives, the victim’s side will crawl towards the perpetrator’s relatives, who have either been sitting down, or standing up, and try to crawl in between their legs. This is in total humility, pleading for mercy and grace from their enemy.²⁷ Basically, each party is at the mercy of the other as they perform the ritual. The perpetrator’s side will also perform the ritual. Traditional dance is performed to celebrate, and to sign, the peace agreement.

²⁷ This is in stark contrast to the peace-child process, expressed in Don Richardson’s book, *Peace Child*.

The *tanu manganga* ritual is a heart-breaking ceremony. There are a lot of poignant speeches (*hee pongo aki*), and nose rubbing (*hee songi*), a traditional form of acceptance, and exchanges of vows towards a fragile relationship. The process of exchanging goods, to further appease the situation, is also performed. It is called *haka'ese*. The act of expressing humility, which is literally to “crawl between legs” (*uungu ba'e*), cements this once-broken relationship. The conventional understanding of accepting and protecting each other has now become their ultimate goal.²⁸

TANU MANGANGA – RECONCILIATION

To understand the imperative of the ritual, we can almost feel the sensation of Paul's encounter in Athens, when he came across an altar with the inscription “To the unknown god” (Acts 17:23). Paul was prompted by the Spirit, to find the right word to communicate the gospel to the people of Athens. In doing so, Paul used images with which the people were accustomed. In this particular encounter, Paul knew the context, “Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious” (Acts 17:32), which enabled him to present the gospel. Here, we find that Paul's knowledge of the cultural context played a vital role in the task of contextualisation.

Contextualisation is a term commonly used in missiology, and is defined in different ways. According to Douglas Hayward, in grappling with *The Heliand*, profoundly highlights the following: (a) ensuring that the gospel is communicated in a manner appropriate to the culture; (b) using appropriate language and imagery from the receptor culture to convey biblical concepts; (c) address the needs and concern of the people of the receptor culture.²⁹ Contextualisation is surely a tough task, a task that demands a careful and thoughtful approach.

In contrast, inadequate contextualisation is, of course, a road to syncretism. This is a term that occurs in theological literature, with strong emphasis. Hendrik Kraemer gives more light to the term:

²⁸ Special thanks to Ezekiel Tuhenua, who informed me of the actual ritual.

²⁹ Douglas Hayward, “Contextualising the Gospel among the Saxons: An Example from the ninth century of the cultural adaptation of the gospel, as found in *The Heliand*”, in *Missiology: An International Review* 22-4 (October 1994), pp. 439-453.

[S]yncretism does not simply mean the mixing of religious elements in different origins (*Religionsmengerei*), which is the usual translation, or interpretation, given to the ignorant questioner. It is in these circles, taken in the sense of a systematic attempt to combine, blend, and reconcile inharmonious, even often conflicting, religious elements, in a new, so-called synthesis.³⁰

With that in mind, the considerable task is to strike a balance between *tanu manganga* and the biblical teaching on reconciliation, eschewing syncretism. Reconciliation is central to God's salvation plan. Every culture has its own way of demonstrating the love of God. The Rennell-Bellona community expresses it through the *tanu manganga* ritual. The scripture tells us to expect this, because of God's general revelation through both creation and conscience (Rom 1:20; Acts 14:16, 17; Rom 2:14, 15; John 1:19). The dynamic of turning towards *tanu manganga* to explicate the biblical proposition of reconciliation is a significant breakthrough. It results in an expanded understanding of reconciliation. The concept needs explanation, as the biblical stance is explored in terms of Hellenistic language and thought patterns. The process may be lengthy, but there is a hint of its profound significance for the future of the Rennell-Bellona church.

Violence is alive and well in today's world, and so are the efforts around the world to see peace reign, through reconciliation. Dispute in the church is also a very common phenomenon, and, thus, is a challenge the church is prompted to deal with.

CONCLUSION: A COMMENTARY

There are Christians, who have a hard time resisting the temptation to seek religious legitimization for their need to take up the sword. There are religions, which, for the sake of religion, pursue retaliation in the name of god. Islam is a well-known and persuasive example of such thinking. Volf rightly responded to this human struggle for retaliation: "If they give in to this temptation, they should forego all attempts to exonerate their version of

³⁰ Hendrik Kraemer, *Religion and the Christian Faith* (London UK: Lutterworth Press, 1956), p. 392.

Christian faith from complicity in fomenting violence.”³¹ This implies that the right thing to do is to take the course of humility advocated in the *tanu manganga* ritual.

In the *tanu manganga* ritual, a Rennell-Bellona warrior basically strips off his traditional attire, which denotes pride and aggression, and puts on that of humility, to seek reconciliation. In the Rennell-Bellona community, reconciliation cannot be expected when one attends the ceremony with traditional attires. In order to be accepted, a warrior has to strip off his traditional attire. This is beautifully expressed in Paul’s word to the church of Ephesus (Eph 2:14-15). Blessing is given not to the violent, but to the meek (Matt 5:5), a notion expressed throughout the *tanu manganga* ritual.

Jesus provides the supreme example, through to the cross, to replace retaliation with humility. He refused to be sucked into the world’s standard, but sought to overcome evil by doing good, which, of course, is the ultimate aim of the ritual.

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QUEST FOR SALVATION IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA: THE YANGORUAN CONTEXT

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INTRODUCTION

Consider the way snails develop: they have humble and unprotected beginnings. But, as time creeps on, they begin to develop protective shells. Within the shell, they are protected from the heat of the sun, the splash of rain, threats in the wild, and have a habitat in which to live. Like the snail needing protection, there is something else that needs protection from the outside world.¹ It is life, which is more precious than anything of value.

Likewise, the culture of any human society is a historically- and traditionally-fashioned shell, which is their shield for survival, and a navigating compass in the world of chaos and identity crisis. Moreover, the cultures of our societies are designed to protect life from the onslaught of the ravenous world that may endanger life. This simply means we should not destroy one's habitation for the sake of knowledge, because this very shell is the cover and a source for life. However, is there another means by which one can bring about change, without damage to the shell? The answer is contextualisation. It is the best available tool, by which one can pursue his or her educational, religious, and scientific purposes, and

¹ Bernard Narakobi, "Christianity and Melanesian Cosmos", in G. W. Trompf, ed., *The Gospel is not Western, Black Theologies from the Southwest Pacific* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1987), pp. 32-44.

become an agent of change. This paper is an attempt to address the Yangoruan search for salvation, fashioned through time and history, in the light of the supra-cultural gospel.²

The rationale for contextualising this aspect of Christian teaching is twofold. Firstly, there is the ongoing Christian attitude that divorces the spiritual from the physical, individual from society, and the immaterial from the material. Secondly, the distinctive approach, taken in this discussion, is purposed to address the post-colonial critique of Yangoruan Christianity as cargoism, and the current strand of teaching, which is building around prosperity.

However, before developing this paper further, the audience of this discussion is reminded that the main defining factor of this paper is “life”. The choice of this term has arisen from my conviction that life gives meaning to everything, without which, all is valueless.

TRADITIONAL ROOT OF SALVATION

What has gone wrong with the Yangoruans? Christianity was introduced to the Yangoruan people almost a century ago, yet they are not satisfied with the eternal blessings which are theirs in Christ. Moreover, why are they still looking for this-worldly, pragmatic blessings everywhere they turn? Are they reverting back to cargoism? Often, we turn a blind eye to the motive behind this situation. The keyword in identifying a Yangoruan attitude towards the Christian teaching of salvation is “life”. Life, for a Yangoruan, is spirit as well as body, corporate as well as personal. It is ancestral, being passed on from ancestor to ancestor. It began with the first Yangoruan ancestor, called *Saii-Urin*,³ who gave life to the family of

² The Yangoruans live in the East Sepik Province of Papua New Guinea.

³ *Saii-Urin* is a combination of words. *Saii* is a root word, which means “god”. However, the descriptive terms attached to the root word, define to whom it was applied. For instance, *Ye-Saii*, means “creator god”. *Urin*, in this case, means “man”. Thus, *Saii-Urin* literally means “god-man”. Therefore, Yangoruans are ancestrally, historically, and traditionally rooted in *Saii-Urin*, the originator and liberator of Yangoruan life and society. *Saii-Urin* was believed to be born of a woman’s blood only, without any male involvement, which means, for Yangoruans, only god can be born in such a way. Local Yangoruan Christians have already seen *Saii-Urin* as the figure of the Emmanuel of the Jews. There is a famous

Yangoruans, and, through time, has fashioned how Yangoruans should live and sustain life. Therefore, Yangoruan life belongs to the ancestor, who gave life, and which life should be treated with all care, here and now, until *Saii-Urin* returns.

STILL SEARCHING FOR SALVATION

Why are Yangoruans still searching for salvation, when it has been over 2,000 years since the birth of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world? And even worse, Papua New Guinea is a Christian, and modern, country, and the Yangoruans have been evangelised since 1912.⁴ However, these questions should be treated with care. One may well say it's all part of their cargoist behaviour, as has been evidenced in history.⁵ Another may say it's properly their culture, religion, politics, or economical ideology. These observations are true, in a sense, because they are avenues, through which salvation from different aspects of life was sought, but the main purpose was sustenance of life from poverty, and ill health, protection from evil cosmic powers, freedom from enslavement, and rescue from anything that may endanger life. On the other hand, the current religious strand also stands as a hallmark for continuous search. For instance, there is the current teaching, which divorces this-worldly and pragmatic blessings from the eternal blessings, the individual from society, and politics and economics from religion. This is promoting the ongoing search for holistic salvation. As missionaries, and their Yangoruan counterparts, keep teaching a salvation that concerns only individual human souls, devoid of

Yangoruan myth that defines Yangoruan history and culture. This god-man was later betrayed by a wicked, old woman on top of a mountain, in the western fringes of Yangoru, and was killed by a wicked tribe. It was during this event that curses and blessings were pronounced. And one of the curses was on life, which became short and toilsome. Good life will be removed, but will be restored when the people have suffered enough to compensate for wrong done to *Saii-Urin*.

⁴ For an in-depth history of the evangelisation of the Yangoru, see Paul Roscoe, *American Ethnologist* 15-3 (1988).

⁵ Yangoruans (Peli Association) founded one of the cargo movements that made the history of Pacific Millenarian Movements. For more information on this movement, see Paul Roscoe, "The Evolution of Revitalisation among the Yangoru Boiken in Papua New Guinea", in *Reassessing Revitalisation Movements: Perspectives from North America and the Pacific Islands*, Michael Harkin, ed., (Lincoln NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), pp. 162-182.

physical blessings, and societal concern, Yangoruans begin to wonder where the salvation of their whole life and society will come from.⁶ This should motivate us to rethink our methods and emphasis. For a Yangoruan, life is one whole. All aspects that preserve life, both temporal and spiritual, cannot be divorced or departmentalised. As Mantovani observed, “The function of the community is biological survival, emotional survival, meaning, and all the facets that are embodied in the word ‘life’.”⁷ This was ingrained in the search for survival, and continuance of life, then and now. The act of this continual search highlights the need for proper biblical contextualisation of the teaching.

COMMUNAL NATURE OF SALVATION

The popular *wantok* system is the monumental structure of the corporate nature of salvation. It is about helping one another live in a world ruled by the principle of “survival of the fittest”. This does not alienate personal decisions, but regulates them on the basis of community life, hence it endangers life. “Community” here means the living-living, the living-dead, and the deities. Therefore, a close relationship and interaction between the Yangoruan ancestral heritage, deities and spirits that inhabit time, space, and history, formed the mechanism in the search for salvation. In the light of this, Daimoi commented; “Melanesian ancestral heritage provides Melanesians with a concept, or a ‘gospel’, as ‘a way of salvation’, encapsulated in the Melanesian understanding of history, time, space, and *Lo*, in direct relationship with the ancestors.”⁸ Therefore, the Yangoruan search for salvation involves the whole universe of his or her surroundings, which is the protective shell, fashioned through time, space, history, and the ethical principles of conduct. It is a concern about protection, restoration, preservation, and survival of Yangoruan society and environment – and not for just an individual, but also a community.

⁶ Henry Mugabe, “Salvation from an African Perspective”, in *Evangelical Review of Theology* 23-3 (1999), p. 242.

⁷ Ennio Mantovani, “Traditional Values and Ethics”, in *An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures, Point 5* (1984), p. 201.

⁸ Joshua Daimoi, *An Exploratory Missiological Study of Melanesian Ancestral Heritage From an Indigenous Evangelical Perspective*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 2004, p. 90.

FOCUS OF SALVATION

However, the main focus of the Yangoruan search is pragmatic and worldly, as Strelan observed: “Salvation in *cargoist* terms is not oriented to the afterlife, to life after death, but to the here and now. Salvation, it is *thought* will eventuate here, on this earth, in this present age, and it will involve all known structures of the society. It is concrete, this-worldly salvation, for which Melanesians hope.”⁹ Although he used negative terms in the wording of this quote, the observation is true of the Yangoruan search for salvation. A this-worldly search for salvation is not the end of the Yangoruan philosophy of salvation; it also has a futuristic aspect. Moreover, a Yangoruan eschatological concept is not forward-looking, but backward-looking. This simply means the Yangoruan future lies in the hand of the ancestors, who will bring to pass what is not yet here. Therefore, sustenance of life here and now is the focus of the Yangoruan search for the good life. Thus, an understanding of this concept can help Christians present the gospel in a holistic manner, which considers life in this world, and the world to come. For example, salvation teachings should include practical know-hows of addressing their daily needs, like money, good health, wealth, food, clothing, housing, and education.

BIBLICAL HISTORY OF SALVATION

However, from biblical history, Harris said; “In both Testaments, God is portrayed pre-eminently as ‘a God who saves’. His ‘kingdom’ is His eternal saving sovereignty, both His saving action as ruler, and the realm where that salvific act is exercised. The essence of each Testament is the announcement that salvation belongs to God.”¹⁰ Thus, the biblical narrative develops from God’s act in saving His people through supernatural and human agency.

⁹ John G. Strelan, *Search for Salvation* (Adelaide SA: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977), p. 81.

¹⁰ M. J. Harris, “Salvation”, in Desmond Alexander, ed., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Leicester UK: IVP, 2000), p. 763.

OLD TESTAMENT NARRATIVE

Therefore, from the Old Testament concept, Wright observed, “A missional hermeneutic of the Bible begins with the Bible’s very existence. For those who affirm some relationship (however articulated) between these texts and the self-revelation of our creator God, the whole canon of scripture is a missional phenomenon, in the sense that it witnesses to the self-giving movement of this God towards His creation and us human beings in God’s own image, but wayward and wanton.”¹¹ On the other hand, Taber said, “The very existence of the Bible is incontrovertible evidence of the God, who refused to forsake His rebellious creation, who refused to give up, who was, and is, determined to redeem and restore fallen creation to His original design.”¹² Marshall said, “The Old Testament usage of the term to express God’s action in saving His people from their enemies has been taken as normative, and salvation has been understood as freeing people from hunger, poverty, and the threat of war, so that they may live a whole life in this world; the thought of spiritual salvation has retreated into the background.”¹³ According to these gentlemen, the whole of the Bible stands as the witness of God’s ultimate mission to save the life of His wayward and wanton children.

However, the fundamental reason for God’s saving acts can be traced back to the first three chapters of the Genesis account. Firstly, there is the creation of human life, which is an image of God in substance,¹⁴ and secondly, there is the fall and alienation of that life from God.¹⁵ It indicates the importance of human life, and why it should be protected from all danger, both spiritually and physically. This “life” is the reason behind God’s pro-life actions that fills His-story. This means God acted in salvation for the survival of humanity at the fall, rescued the people from eternal condemnation and physical infirmities in Christ, and is still acting in salvation through the church, until believers are taken to glory on the return

¹¹ Christopher H. Wright, *The Mission of God* (Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2006), p. 48.

¹² Charles R. Taber, “Missiology and the Bible”, in *Missiology* 11 (1983), p. 232.

¹³ L. H. Marshall, “Salvation”, in Sinclair B. Ferguson, ed., *New Dictionary of Theology* (Leicester UK: IVP, 1988), p. 611.

¹⁴ Gen 1:26-27; 2:4-7.

¹⁵ Gen 3:1-17.

of Jesus at the last day.¹⁶ These observations highlight God's holistic salvific acts towards His wayward and wanton children.

Communal Nature of Salvation

Generally, the Old Testament nature of salvation is more social than individual. Where individuals are singled out, it seems to be for communal life.¹⁷ For instance, the Genesis and Exodus accounts develop the idea of God anointing specific individuals for mediating God's salvific acts towards the community: Abraham's call for the birth of a nation (Gen 12:1-3), Noah's faithfulness for saving a family (Gen 8-9), Joseph's rise in leadership to gather for family survival (Gen 47:4-7), and Moses' calling for the rescue of a nation (Ex 12). These indicate the communal nature of salvation. Although there were instances of individual salvation (1 Sam 1:16-20; Ps 43; 86), it is often the community, as a whole, that experienced God's deliverance.¹⁸ However, salvation was also designed for individuality, and was enacted within the community.

Focus of Salvation

In the wake many human experiences in biblical history, the spiritual need for salvation was driven underground. This was pointed out by Marshall, "Thus the Old Testament understanding of salvation is quite concrete, and often covers more than spiritual blessings."¹⁹ On the other hand, Arnold said: "In general, the Old Testament writers see salvation as a reality, more physical than spiritual, more social than individual."²⁰ Therefore, the drive for physical survival of the race was in the forefront, but also moving towards a time when spiritual liberation will come from the hand of God.

NEW TESTAMENT NARRATIVE

In New Testament, we stand face to face with the Creator God, who comes in flesh, born into a human family and culture. Here, the advent name

¹⁶ Edward N. Gross, "Salvation", in A. Scott Moreau, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 2000), p. 849.

¹⁷ Bill T. Arnold, "Salvation", in Walter Elwell, ed., *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1996), p. 701.

¹⁸ Harris, "Salvation", pp. 762-767.

¹⁹ Marshall, "Salvation", p. 610.

²⁰ Arnold, "Salvation", p. 701.

“Emmanuel”, “God with us”, signifies momentous progress in the history of salvation.²¹

The New Dawn of Salvation

In the new dawn of history, we are amazed with wonder, as God, in His gracious choice, becomes “God with us”, in the person of Jesus Christ. On one occasion, He announced, “The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”²² On another occasion, Jesus declared; “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”²³ Are these proclamations just for the future, or did He mean here and now? John Stott, in his observation of evangelical Christianity, commented; “There is a constant tendency in the church to trivialise the nature of salvation, as if it meant no more than self-reformation, or the forgiveness of our sins, or a personal passport to paradise, or a private mystical experience, without social or moral consequences.”²⁴

This observation reflects the divorced mentality of the church’s teaching today, which divorces social responsibility from moral responsibility, this-worldly from other-worldly, and community from individual. Therefore, it is urgent that we rescue salvation from these caricatures, and recover the doctrine in its biblical fullness. Salvation is a radical transformation in three phases: beginning at our conversion, continuing throughout our earthly life, and brought to perfection when Christ comes. Therefore, salvation teaching should consider the teaching as holistic, both in its past, present, and future experiences.

²¹ Ibid., p. 702.

²² Luke 4:18-19.

²³ John 10:10b.

²⁴ John Stott, *New Issues Facing Christians Today* (London UK: Marshall Pickering, 1999), p. 27.

Communal Nature of Salvation

In the New Testament, the individual aspect of salvation is self-evident, in terms of the work of Christ, which is strongly emphasised within evangelical circles. Tate, quoting from Gerhard Lohfink, recorded: "Jesus' message of salvation brings about a complete shift from the collective to the individual. The individualising tendency is tangible everywhere. The prefiguration of the Old Testament Jewish relationship to God, constituted through the relation of Yahweh to the people, through covenant, cult, and Torah loses its normative power."²⁵ Tate, commenting on this quote, said: "This hyper-individualistic concept of salvation does not fit well with biblical perspectives, and leads to serious theological, ecclesial, and ethical distortions."²⁶ However, from Tate's argument, Jesus is the creator of a new human family, based on faith and obedience. According to this fact, there is no major shift, as assumed by Lohfink, instead, there is continuity involved in God's saving work, from the old to the new. This means there is a continuation of Israel, but new in the sense that it is composed of multicultural and multi-ethnic people, who put their faith in Jesus.

For instance, the multicultural Christian communities, presented in the book of Acts and the Pauline epistles, portray the communal nature of salvation. On the other hand, John 3:16-17 portrays God's heart for the whole human family, although rebellious and wanton, as we are, God's absolute purpose, promised to Abraham, must come to pass (Gen 12:3b). Bosch, on the other hand, affirmed: "Indeed, Christians are a community of a special kind. They are called 'saints', the 'elect', those 'called', 'loved', and 'known by God'."²⁷ This reaffirms the importance of the communal-life principle that discourages individualism. However, this is not to ignore the fact that a decision has to be taken individually, but should then move into the family of believers for nourishment and growth.

²⁵ Gerhard Lohfink, quoted in Marvin Tate, "The Comprehensive Nature of Salvation in Biblical Perspective", in *Review & Expositor* 91-4 (Fall 1994), pp. 469-485, reprinted in *Evangelical Review of Theology* 23-3 (1999), pp. 205-221.

²⁶ Tate, "The Comprehensive Nature of Salvation in Biblical Perspective", pp. 469-485.

²⁷ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1991), p. 166.

Focus of Salvation

As we turn to the New Testament, we sense a new sort of focus, which focuses on the total renewal of the persons who made up the community of believers. The new emphasis focuses on faith as the supreme deciding factor of being a member of the new family; a family, of multi-ethnic and multicultural background, who finds its place in the God of the Jews in the Old Testament. It is life that finds its roots back to the Creator God, who gives equal opportunity for both Jews and non-Jews to share in the riches of His blessings, here, and in the world to come. Salvation, therefore, encompasses both physical and spiritual dimensions. For example, Jesus' earthly ministry was characterised by evangelism, empowered with social concern, which echoes the holistic focus of salvation. Where health, poverty, blindness, imprisonment, or any human ailment existed, He addressed that social issue first before evangelism, and, in the absence of such social issues, He preached the gospel of the kingdom.²⁸ Both His preaching and social action went hand in hand, for the purpose of saving the person, both spiritually and physically. Therefore, in the light of this observation, salvation is holistic, and any biblical approach to this subject should think and act holistically.

BIBLICAL ORIENTATION AND APPLICATION

Having surveyed the Yangoruan, and the biblical histories of salvation, one cannot ignore the familiar grounds that exist. However, for a Yangoruan Christian, the biblical history of salvation is already common ground. A vast amount of teaching is analogous to Yangoruan philosophy and expectation. For instance, the biblical teaching on salvation includes freeing people from slavery, protection from enemies and threat of war, rescue from poverty, healing, and liberation from any physical danger.

Although there is commonality in the basic nature of salvation, there are differences between biblical and Yangoruan concepts of salvation. In this case, three major differences can be identified. Firstly, there is God's authorship and mediating role in salvation in relation to Yangoruan human

²⁸ Matt 8-9; Mark 5:1-43; 6:30-56; 7: 24-36; Luke 4:31-44; 5:12-26; John 2:1-11; 11:1-44.

and ancestral efforts.²⁹ Secondly, God's gracious choice,³⁰ and human response, in faith and obedience,³¹ in relation to the Yangoruan drive for correct ritualism as a means to gaining salvation. Thirdly is Jesus' uniqueness in relation to the Yangoruan myth of *Saii-Urin*. These highlight the need to weave the histories into one history that will be accepted, both in its local and its universal settings.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

In a society, like the Yangoru, where its mode of salvation depends on human and ancestral efforts and experience, at the absence of grace, faith, and obedience, the task of comparing and contextualising should find core elements that motivate the expressions. Moreover, to begin with, the common grounds that the Yangoruan share with biblical history and the biblical prerequisites of salvation, may be core factors, but may not adequately address the differences. The nucleus of both histories is life, and the source of that life.

Both the biblical people, and the people of Yangoru, have beginnings in their stories of how life began. The beginnings of human life and ancestry can be traced back to God, as the Creator God of all life, and the Sustainer of all life. The Bible records the creation of the first human family, fashioned to enjoy life in its fullness, while in harmonious relationship with God, with each other, and with the rest of creation. However, the loss of that life-relationship in the fall, marks the beginnings of the search for life. Thus, we find the Yangoruan culture fallible, but a means to which Yangoruans owe their life and being. However, in the middle of this search, God came, clothed in human flesh and likeness, to restore fullness of life, which all human and ancestral efforts were unable to restore.

In the light of these observations, Yangoruans were genuine seekers of that life, but had fallen short of the true knowledge of the source. Therefore, biblical history, and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, now becomes the lamp to guide the Yangoruans back to the Creator of all life. On the other hand,

²⁹ Ps 68:19-20; Heb 2:10; 7:25.

³⁰ Ex 34:6-7; Neh 9:26; Eph 2:5; 2 Thess 2:13; Tit 2:11.

³¹ Deut 11:26-28; 28; Matt 3:6, 8; Acts 3:19; 17:30; 20:31.

the Yangoruan myth of the god-man, *Saii-Urin*, and the ancestral heritage, can be a type of the historical Jesus, the Saviour and Sustainer of whole life. A term used in Isaiah: “Emmanuel”, (God with us),³² was later applied to Jesus, in the gospel of Matthew and in the gospel of John³³ Jesus declared to His disciples that He would be with them, through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Yangoruans can identify with “Emmanuel” as the *Saii-Urin* of history, through whom *Ye-Saii* dwelt among them.

The biblical narrative begins with the creation of the first human family, thereby suggesting that family and life are not of human origin. Family is also a sphere of Jesus’ concern and actions. This fact was demonstrated when Jesus chose to be born into a family and into a culture. This illustrates that the giver of life cannot be separated from the family of living beings. Through Yangoruan eyes, this biblical fact is the basis for all Yangoruan acts and attitudes towards life. As commended by Daimoi, “Melanesians see their community as one holistic entity, where a wholesome interaction takes place in the political, social, religious, and the economic areas of life. The key to this interrelationship is life in the ancestors.”³⁴ This captures the heart of Yangoruan family-life-oriented systems, which we call the *wantok* system. It carries the idea of working together to live together.

APPLICATION

However, within the context of this discussion, our Lord’s entire life, as depicted in the gospels, represents one long application, with single-minded concern for God’s glory, and humanity’s need for life in its fullness. In the light of this wonderful truth, I cannot wait to invite the searching Yangoruans, the people and their environment, to celebrate with me in song.

“Come!
Yangoruans come:

³² Is 7:10-17; 8:8; 9:1-7.

³³ Matt 1:20-23; John 14:15-23.

³⁴ Daimoi, “An Exploratory Missiological Study”, p. 8.

Old and young, poor and rich, leaders and commoners, strong and weak,
healthy and unhealthy, come!
Come forth, mountains, come, let your streams water the valleys and plains,
plains and valleys rejoice in the life flow,
Rivers flow, fill the salty waters with lively freshness,
Swaying palm trees, dance to the beat of the winds,
Birds, and the wild, rise and sing in the new dawn of the day.
Come Yangoruans,
Come celebrate the good news,
Salvation belongs to our *Saii-Urin*, who was told of old.
Young and old, rise and dance,
For I have found the secret of life in Jesus, our *Saii-Urin*.
Tell it to the mountains, tell it to the valleys, tell it to the rivers, tell it to the
seas,
Come all you ends of the earth, dance and celebrate with me,
Announce it to the whole world, so that they may hear the wondrous love of
Jesus, our *Saii-Urin*, who has come, that the weak be strengthened,
the poor be rich, the unhealthy be healthy, the unwise be wise, sin
and shame vanishes, the fearful be fearless, and life be refurbished.

“Listen!!

You cosmic powers, and the foe of old,
Listen, angels and demons, spirits and deities, mountain gods and river
gods, witches and sorcerers, fortune-tellers and magicians,
Your warden days are over,
See, I am freed from your ageless hold,
Never will you fool again,
Never will you lure again,
Never will you be worshipped again,
Never will you be feared again,
You be sorry, and gnash your teeth,
You are chained, and be ready for your final destiny.

“Rejoice!!

Yangoruans rejoice,
The Ancient of Days has come to redeem, He came.
Life to its fullness we'll see,
Our universe redeemed,
All adversaries put to flight.
Life to its totality restored.

Hold on, hold on to Jesus, our *Saii-Urin*, our life and source.”³⁵

In jubilation, we turn to see Jesus, our *Saii-Urin*, as the Life and Source of Yangoruans families and environment, through whom all the family of Yangoruans will live, day by day, in hope of a future kingdom.

“*Saii-Urin with Us*” – *Our Life and Source*

In the midst of our longing, wonderful news broke out all over the world in the 1st century that man shall not be a lone seeker of the lost life, but that God is with him, in flesh and blood. This good news reached the Yangoruans in the early 20th century, but no one could tell us that Jesus was our long-expected *Saii-Urin*, who would come from our *Ye-Saii*. In ignorance, missionaries clothed in foreign fashion and likeness, a God who is concerned only about an individual’s soul and spirituality, devoid of physical realities. Many of us, out of curiosity and our many needs, flooded foreign clubs,³⁶ maybe to know a little bit of their magic, so that we can have plenty just as the messengers of the foreign clubs. With our culturally- and traditionally-groomed mind-set, we search for life in its fullness everywhere we turn, however, our every move has come under the scrutiny of outsider insiders, who branded us as cargoists. However, little did they know that our *Saii-Urin* had fashioned us in both spiritual and physical dimensions, which we call life. Missionaries introduced to us a spiritual life, with the absence of the physical realities that torment us each day. Could this be the life that the Bible teaches, or does the Bible teach both spiritual and physical life? Who could explain it to us in our own terms, so that we should know?

In the midst of this confusion and loneliness, the God of the Bible comes to us in Jesus Christ, our *Saii-Urin*, through his *Hehluasafa*,³⁷ to enlighten us, to know Him, to worship Him, to serve Him, and to proclaim Him in all we

³⁵ A song of celebration dedicated to a winning deity from the Nimienduon (BoimSara) tribe of Yangoru. However, in translation, the author of this article has made alterations, for contextualisation purposes. The author is a member, and a leader, in the making of the tribe.

³⁶ “Foreign clubs” refers to denominational organisations that filled our every village, all promising salvation in the world to come.

³⁷ Boiken term used to describe the spirit of *Saii-Urin* that indwells good people, to promote a good life.

do and say. We can proclaim today that the Ancestor of our ancestors, and the Originator of our life, Jesus Christ, our *Saii-Urin*, has come, and is here with us. He is the *Ye-Saii*,³⁸ who has come to us in Jesus, and taken our flesh and blood, our ancestral history, time and space, into union with Himself. By this fact, we should now acknowledge that Jesus Christ, who came in our likeness, was the Creator God of our life, and the whole of our universe and environment. Despite the usurping cosmic powers of darkness, the planetary order remains in God's hands, and is not outside of His control.³⁹ This is the assurance of our security, protection, comfort, well-being, and wholeness. In the coming of Jesus, God sanctifies our life in the flesh, and lays His hand on the whole of life. This means God's interest and concern cannot be confined to the inward and spiritual, since the material and the outward is also taken into union with Him in Christ. By this, He defined the total nature of His salvation towards us, His rebellious and wanton creatures. This means that we will no longer search alone, but we will live side by side with our *Ye-Saii*.

“Saii-Urin With Us” – Our Life Here and Now

How should we then live in light of the fact that our *Saii-Urin* lives among us? I believe our immediate responsibility towards God should be to exalt Him by redirecting our *garamuts*, *kundus*, bamboo pipes, dances, and songs in worship, thanksgiving, and praise, delighting in Him, blessing Him, rejoicing in His truth, glorifying in His grace, mercy, love, purity, faithfulness, and kindness.⁴⁰ In addition to our worship, we should serve and proclaim Him, in all we do and say. This includes the recognition that we exist by God's will and purpose, and, thereby, deliberately setting ourselves to living for His glory, in every aspect of life, proclaiming the good news of His salvation, graciously offered to everyone. Our society, however, is not neutral, but filled with sin and shame, idols and idolatry, demonic agencies, and false objects of worship. We are called to challenge these usurpers, and to confront these false deities, who once enslaved and bewitched us, in the name of our Life and Source, Jesus, our *Saii-Urin*. It

³⁸ Boiken term used to describe the Supreme Being that created everything that exists. In other words, the Creator God.

³⁹ Bruce Milne, *Know the Truth* (Leicester UK: IVP, 1982), p. 215.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

involves living in such a way that the God we proclaim in our speaking is manifested in every area of our life. For instance, our work life, our religious life, and our social life, should all reflect our new life in Christ.

Therefore, we need to assess our life in the light of Jesus' own response to these this-worldly aspects, and to enlighten those who accuse Yangoruan Christianity of being cargo-oriented. Many of us are seeing work as burdensome, and something that needs to be avoided. As a result of this mentality, we still search for the good life in every prosperity-oriented, illusionary teaching of salvation.

For instance, the seed-planting ministry discourages work by pointing people away from the present to the future.⁴¹ It points away from the present laborious effort to sustain life here and now. It has made people feel so spiritual that they seem to forget that they still need food, money, clothes, education, good health, and so forth, to live here on earth.

Moreover, the level of our economic status defines our attitude towards work. A popular Yangoruan preacher once asked, “[sic] Why is the heathen growing richer, when God’s chosen are growing poorer?” To answer this question, we need to read between the lines. It is all about our attitude towards work. But, if we believe that Jesus with us in our daily life, then we should also believe that work and economy go hand in hand. Work should be seen as a blessing to His people, who are called by His name. In creating the world, and all it holds, including humanity, our *Ye-Saii* demonstrated the sanctity of work. Therefore, Yangoruan should see work as part daily life. We should work so that we will minister to the poor, sick, imprisoned, orphans, widows, unwanted, and to the rejected of our society. Failing to work may result in the failure of our mercy ministry to society, and our witness that “*Saii-Urin* with us” is our life, here and now. Thereby, our socio-political and socio-religious life can be affected by our attitude towards work.

⁴¹ The seed-planting ministry is the name of a specific ministry that has influenced Yangoruan people.

“Saii-Urin With Us” – Our Life to Come

However, in anticipation of a future kingdom, our daily life should reflect the new-kingdom principle. Jesus encourages us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and to love our neighbour as ourselves.⁴² This statement is the preamble of all the socio-political, socio-economic, and religious life of the new kingdom. Therefore, love is the principle that should govern our every act that should point to a life that is coming. Our love for God should permeate our society, by transforming humanity into the kingdom of God, by regenerating all human relationships. Therefore, our life, here and now, should be lived in awareness of the life to come, in our work attitude, our social relationships, and our religious life.

CONCLUSION

Yangoruans do not see salvation as a personal passport to paradise, as advocated by many of the salvation teachings of the Christian church in Yangoru today. Salvation, for Yangoruan, was historically and traditionally designed to be comprehensive, which involves the individual and society, body and spirit, present and future. Therefore, salvation, in a Yangoruan context, means wrestling with issues that hinder the reaching of fullness of life, here and now. These include poverty, disease, neo-colonialism, good education, oppression, ethnic tensions, sexism, and a race-superiority syndrome. Thus, the salvation that Jesus offers: in His incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and His second coming, is comprehensive, and involves the totality of the human person, which corresponds with the Yangoruan philosophy, but which has fallen short of the true knowledge of the source of that life. Hence, Christians should work for the reign of God, calling individuals, and their communities, to faith in Jesus, who is their life and source, their life here and now, and their life to come.

⁴² Matt 22:37-40.

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FEAR AND TRADITIONAL BELIEFS IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA: PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Why do Christians fear? This is a question that often lingered in my mind as I studied theology over the years. From childhood to adulthood, there is fear. There is no difference, between non-believers and believers there is fear. In my local church in Anguganak, from congregation members to church elders, there is fear.¹ Fear is one of the weaknesses in Christians across Papua New Guinea. In this article, I will discuss what causes fear, and present three ways in my culture that, I think, fear takes root. I will then respond with what the Bible says about fear.

WHAT CAUSES FEAR?

It is difficult to understand why Christians, especially those who have been in the church for a long time, fear spirits, suffering, and sickness in life. The answers usually revolve around their faith. Are they genuine Christians? Do they know they are saved by the grace of God? Do they know that Jesus Christ defeated fear on the cross?

One of the weaknesses in my church in Anguganak is fear. From the least to the most important in my church, people find it hard to overcome fear in their lives. I will identify three types of fear: fear of spirits; fear of suffering, due to eating culturally inappropriate food; and fear of clotheslines.

¹ Anguganak is located in the West Sepik Province of Papua New Guinea.

FEAR OF SPIRITS: ANCESTORS AND NATURE

Before converting to Christianity, Papua New Guineans were bound up with their cultural beliefs and practices. The people give respect to their ancestors, acknowledging that their ancestors govern their daily lives. The people have a system of beliefs and practices that enable them to understand, explain, and validate the origin and existence of the world, its resources, powers, laws, and techniques. The system can be referred to as “animism”, or “primal religion”.²

Since there was such a strong tie to ancestors in the cultural view of the people of Anguganak, there developed the concept of living a good life to please the ancestors. It is a life lived on moral ethics, including how people relate to one another, and how they do things. The people look at life as not merely “biological existence and survival, but it is abundant life, life in its fullness”.³ The abundant life includes harmony, peace, unity, social justice, wholeness, restoration, freedom, security, plenitude, and release from oppression. This is the desired life – the good life. Papua New Guineans strive for the good life, captured in the Pidgin term *gutpela sindaun*. It is only possible, though, when things are right. Man must be in right relationship with others, nature, and the supernatural.

I recall, when I was a small boy, my parents often told me not to go out at night, because the spirits of my ancestors, *tumbuna*, were walking around, and I must not disturb them. I was also told not to go near the lake, *raun wara*, or else the spirit of the lake would kidnap me. Parents warn their children from a very young age. The fear of these spirits is so embedded in the mind of a child that it can take a long time to overcome the fear, through the power of Christ, during one’s life.

FEAR OF SUFFERING: EATING FOOD FROM A SECOND-BORN BROTHER

Papua New Guineans are diverse in cultures and languages, but all Papua New Guineans are relationship-oriented people. They uphold their identity as a clan and tribal member by strictly adhering to cultural norms. In

² Marilyn Rowsome, “Melanesian Traditional Religion”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 17-2 (2001), p. 36.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

Anguganak, this includes respecting blood brothers, by recognising their rank from first-born to last-born in the family. As part of this, the fear of eating food, cooked by the wife of a second-born brother, is a major concern, in both the community and the church. Let me give an example. In my family, I have four sisters and two brothers, and I am the second. If I scraped a coconut for my wife to get coconut juice to cook the food, my older brother will not eat that food. This restriction applies to every area of getting and preparing food, whether it is wild game, coconuts, sago palms, or domestic pigs.

In every case, my elder brother is forbidden to touch, let alone eat, the food. This is because of the belief that he will encounter some physical disability in his body, such as knee or back problems, in addition to lowering his status, and limiting his rights as an elder brother in the family. The status of being an elder brother is very important, especially when it comes to the father passing on the blessings of the tribe and the clan. Elder brothers are not ignorant of such privileges. Even those in the church in Anguganak strongly adhere to this custom. Fear in the church, therefore, is a big issue affecting believers' relationships with Jesus Christ. Fear of losing contact with one another, receiving criticism, and being rejected as an outcast, are all real concerns.

FEAR OF THE CLOTHESLINE: ASTHMA AND DEATH

A few years ago, a pastor and I saw an exhausted old church elder approaching the pastor's house on the road. There was a clothesline between the road and the pastor's house. The church elder called for a cup of water to be brought to him. The pastor's son fetched the water, walked under the clothesline, and brought it to the church elder on the road. The church elder, however, took the cup of water and poured it out on the road. He then walked to the house, but took a different way. Instead of walking under the clothesline, he went around it, jumping over a flowerbed to get to the house. After the elder got a drink, the pastor and I walked over to him and asked him to say sorry to the little boy for not taking the cup of water from him. We asked the church elder to explain his actions. The church elder said that, since the cup of water had passed under the clothesline, he could not drink it. According to his culture, if he were to drink the water,

then he would get asthma and die. I was shocked about the statement. The church elder was living in fear of drinking water from a cup that had passed under the clothesline!

WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT FEAR

It is in the church that the Lordship of Christ is fully realised. The presence of a redeemed community in the world is a visible sign that reconciliation with God, through Christ, means freedom from anything that may bring bondage. As the church displays this freedom, it announces to spirits that they have no power over believers (Eph 3:10).

The Word of God has much to say about fear. It also encourages those who adhere to the Word to hide scripture in their heart, so that they are equipped and ready. That is to say, that, whenever fear comes in, the believers can apply the Word of God to drive the fear away so that the fear does not take control of them.

Christians should not let cultural fear dictate their lives. Rather, they should know that their life is both physically and spiritually in God's hands. The Bible says that God alone is to be feared (Ps 76:7). God alone will deliver His people from all their fears (Ps 34:4). Christians should not pretend that they are freed if they continue to deny the fear that holds them. This will lead to failures in life. They will not grow in their Christian life, rather, they will go down in their faith. As the Apostle John wrote, "the one who fears is not made perfect" (1 John 4:18).

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have looked at three causes of fear. It is very sad to know that Christians, even church elders, still have a fear of culture, which greatly impacts their lives. It is important to understand that God is outside of culture; in fact, He originally instituted it. However, if evil spiritual forces influence culture, then it has become bad. Those spiritual forces promote counterfeit thoughts to create fear in the lives of believers. The believers then shift their trust in Jesus Christ, to whatever one adheres to.

On the other hand, the Bible is the lasting solution to solve the problem of fear. Fear only comes when there is a lack of biblical knowledge, when there is less focus on the cross of Calvary and its effectiveness, when there is not enough doctrinal teaching about God and His work in believers' lives. When one's knowledge of truth is limited, it opens the way for fear to infiltrate the church.

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