




Vol 27, No 1

2011

MELANESIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY



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of Papua New Guinea**
Paliaima Aiyery Tanda

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Hone Hewa Tawalipa, the Great Spirit**
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of the Eschatological Frameworks: the Bible and Ours**
Ma'afu Palu

Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools



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Subscription prices include airmail. We do not offer surface-mail prices.
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ISSN 0256-856X Volume 27, Number 1 2011

This journal is indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database*, published by the American Theological Library Association, 250 S. Wacker Dr., 16th Flr, Chicago IL 60606, Email: atla@atla.com, Internet: www.atla.com

This journal is abstracted in *Religious and Theological Abstracts*, 121 South College Street (PO Box 215), Myerstown PA 17067 USA

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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.

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

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EDITORIAL

This volume covers a variety of topics related to Melanesia: the *wantok* system, a scrutiny of a traditional high-god in Papua New Guinea, and an exploration of eschatological frameworks for understanding scripture. Each topic, in its own way, adds to the ongoing discussion of applying God's Word in a Melanesian context.

In the first article, Paliama compares the *wantok* system, in both its traditional and contemporary expressions. Since the *wantok* system affects every sector of society, including churches, he uses the South Sea Evangelical church (SSEC) as a case study to see how its spiritual and physical development is affected by the *wantok* system. Paliama delves into the issues of leadership, evangelism, sin, ministry appointments, discipleship, and favouritism, concluding the article with recommendations for the church today.

In the next article, Auwi seeks to convince the current generation of Yuna people of Papua New Guinea that their traditional high-spirit, *Hone Hewa Tawalipa*, was the God of the Bible. Auwi argues that today's Yuna people cannot be separated from the past, because the past is their identity, where they came from, and it forms part of what they will be in the future. Building on this belief, Auwi presents a case for the Yuna people of Papua New Guinea to follow the God of the Bible, without turning their back on their traditional history.

In the final article, Ma'afu offers recommendations for implementing Pacific contextual theology. Firstly, he encourages theologians of the Pacific to stop ignoring the eschatological element of the gospel in their contextualisation efforts. Secondly, he argues that Pacific history should be interpreted in light of God's redemptive plan. Thirdly, people of the Pacific today should understand they are living in the last days, which is a call for living for Christ. Fourthly, valid eschatological frameworks, rather than downplaying the applicability of the Bible's teachings for believers

today, should reinforce the contemporary relevance of God's Word for believers of every time.

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.

AN ANALYTICAL EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTS OF THE WANTOK SYSTEM IN THE SOUTH SEA EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Paliaima Aiyery Tanda

Paliaima Tanda graduated from the Christian Leaders' Training College in Papua New Guinea in 2010. This article was Paliaima's Bachelor of Theology thesis.

INTRODUCTION

All sectors of Melanesian¹ society are interwoven into a network called the *wantok*² system. This is a system of gaining access to what a person needs or desires: jobs, positions, wealth, money, contracts, and food. It includes the gaining of support by dubious or transparent means, through someone to whom one is related. For those who benefit, or are affected by it, this idiom is often used: "It is through whom one knows, and not through what one knows."

To the ordinary population from the streets and slums of urban centres to the family units of kunai-patched huts of Melanesian villages and hamlets, the *wantok* system is part of the lifestyle. It has two sides: the positive and the negative, advantages and disadvantages, strengths and weaknesses. The *wantok* system also exists, in varying degrees, all around the world. In the United States, people see it as a very negative thing, and do not talk about it, because they make it seem like there is no favouritism. Stories of

¹ Darrell L. Whiteman defines Melanesia as a Greek term to mean "Black Islands", first coined in 1832 by the 19th-century French navigator Dumont d'Urville to describe all those parts of the Pacific inhabited by people with dark skin. Darrell L. Whiteman, "An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures", in *Point* 5 (1984), p. 86.

² *Wantok* literally means one language. However, for an in-depth meaning, refer to the definition of *wantok* system on page 7.

politicians' children going to very good schools, like Yale and Harvard universities, despite not meeting the requirements, have been heard.³

In Melanesia, and especially Papua New Guinea, the *wantok* system has an unhealthy impact in almost every sector of the community, since the traditional concept and practice is being distorted for selfish gains today. The country's statutory institutions, like the legislative body (Parliament), judiciary, police, defence, correctional services, and education, health, transport, and finance, are so thoroughly permeated by the *wantok* system that there is no breathing space for honesty. The private sector and non-government organisations (NGOs), and churches are no exception.

Therefore, this article will compare the *wantok* system practices, in traditional and contemporary Melanesian society, and its impact. Since churches are no exception to this destructive system, the South Sea Evangelical church (SSEC) of Papua New Guinea (PNG) will be used as a case study to see how its spiritual and physical growth is affected. It will also explore the biblical perspective, and recommend ways on how to temper the *wantok* system.

WANTOK SYSTEM

WANTOK SYSTEM DEFINED

What is the “*wantok* system?” Here are two words from two different languages – “*wantok*” in Melanesian Pidgin, and “system” in English. *Wantok* literally means “one language” in Pidgin. However, “one language” in Melanesia does not necessarily mean the spoken language, but covers the whole scope of activities or actions carried out within the kinship relations, and relations established outside the kinship lines. “System” means a set of ideas, methods, ways of working, or a group of related parts that work together as a whole for a particular purpose.⁴ Therefore, the *wantok* system is a relationship of sharing, supporting, protecting, providing, and caring that reaches out to meet the needs, wants, and desires

³ Mangi Kerema, “*Wantok and Wantokism*”, <http://pnglife.blogspot.com/2005/01/wantoks.html>. Internet accessed August 29, 2009.

⁴ *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*.

of individuals and groups, who are related. It is a system that focuses on maintaining kinship relations, so that provisions for relatives take first priority over those who are not related. Fangalea defines the *wantok* system as, “a system that places high value on people, related biologically, linguistically, culturally, and regionally. When dealing with others, especially in making decisions and choices, preferential treatment will always be given to *wantoks*.”⁵

The *wantok* system, therefore, is basically favouritism, based on kinship. However, sometimes it extends beyond and towards trade partners, and those who share similar views and ideologies. The Pidgin equivalent of English words, such as “favouritism”, “nepotism”, and “partiality” can all be seen in the *wantok* system.

MELANESIAN KINSHIP

All societies in the world have their own established cultures and traditions (accepted ways of doing things) like marriage, reasoning, farming, relationship, religion, leadership, social and governmental structures, and many other things. Anyone who comes from outside a particular culture will have to learn the culture and traditions of whatever society the person may want to live in, or do his activities. One has to learn by observing and participating, or by prior study from some other sources, to avoid unnecessary embarrassments and failures.

PNG, as part of the broader Melanesian society, is a nation that continues to embrace its traditional cultures, despite some very disturbing facts of outside influence. Traditions, like seeking consent from the parents before marriage, respect for the elderly, and decent dressing codes have been pushed into oblivion. However, caring and providing for one another is one of those traditions that continues to maintain its place in Melanesian culture.

⁵ Gideon Fangalea, “An Analytical Evaluation of the Spirituality of the South Sea Evangelical church in the Solomon Islands” (B.Th. thesis, CLTC, 2009), p. 15.

In Melanesia, social relations are primarily kinship relations. Closely-related people live together, and associate with each other in various enterprises.⁶ Kin has to be understood as *wantok* (people related biologically), including extended families.

Another facet of kinship relationship is interpersonal relationship, where one is attracted by the personalities of people living in certain localities, rather than a genealogical relationship.⁷ Peoples' primary affiliation is to lineage, clan, co-residents, allies, and trade partners.⁸ Tribal warfare and protection, contribution towards compensation for reconciliation and to settle tensions, sharing of goods and wealth, appointment of leaders, bride price, and denominational ties in Melanesian society are built around kinship or *wantoks*.

TRADITIONAL MELANESIAN *WANTOK* SYSTEM

In traditional Melanesia, the *wantok* system worked within the kinship boundaries. Kinship terms were being used to identify relationships of various kinds: blood relatives, extended families, individuals, and groups affiliated through clan lines, co-residents, trade partners, and tribal war cohorts, so that activities could be carried out within the perimeters of this relationship. Others, apart from kinship relations, were regarded as strangers, and sometimes as enemies. There were two core reasons behind these *wantok* relationships:

- (a) *To be accepted.* In traditional PNG, a member of a family did not exist for himself or herself. The member became part of everything that went on in the family, clan, and the community. It could be gardening, feasts, bride price, defence, tribal wars, and/or compensation. Not only that, they also shared in the privileges and the assets of the community. Failure to fulfil one's kinship obligations as a *wantok* invited

⁶ Whiteman, "An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures", p. 109.

⁷ Daniel R. Shaw, *Kinship Studies in Papua New Guinea* (Ukarumpa PNG: SIL, 1974), p. 11.

⁸ Michael A. Rynkiewich, "Politics in Papua New Guinea: Continuities, Changes, and Challenges", in *Point* 24, (2000), p. 18.

rejection, ridicule, and humiliation from family, clan, and the community, which was the worst thing a Melanesian could endure.

- (b) *Sharing*. Sometimes it was seen as reciprocity, but there are some slight distinctions. Sharing, in traditional PNG, fell into three categories: (i) providing for those who could not support themselves. It was simply a gesture of kindness, like the offering of food, firewood, shelter, and comfort. Nothing was expected in return. (ii) Sharing of gifts between equal parties. For the most part, this was to maintain relationship. (iii) Providing of help, when needed, so that it could be returned when their turn for help arrived. An example of this can be seen in cases where the relatives of a dead person are provided with food and other needs for a funeral. The relatives are likely to repay this kindness when there is a death in the other family. The latter two can be seen as reciprocity. There were other reasons, too, but they hung very much on these two.

Wantokism, therefore, was a system in-built into the culture. No one was taught how to practise the *wantok* system, because it spontaneously flowed out towards one another. The *wantok* system spoke to the whole person; it was a lifestyle, and not a system of socio-economic manipulation,⁹ as it is witnessed today. It was always kinship-oriented and benefited all within the kinship lines.

CONTEMPORARY WANTOK SYSTEM

It was a hot Friday afternoon, and the queue seemed to be endless outside the bank. The security personnel manning the door could hardly let people in, despite valid excuses, like being late for the bus home, or of it being risky keeping large amounts of money outside. You could clearly read the hardness of heart written over the security guard's face. After a little while, a gentleman approached the guard, and, for a few seconds, a conversation went on. With a handshake, the hard and serious look on the face of the guard gave way to a soft smile, and the gentleman was allowed into the bank. Two more women entered the bank the same way as the gentleman

⁹ Daniel R. Shaw, "The *Wantok* System", in *Catalyst* 1-1 (1974), pp. 1-11.

did. After asking a bystander why they were allowed in, he said, “the guard and the gentleman play for the same team in a local rugby league competition, while the women were allowed in because they taught at a school where the guard’s daughter attends”. Sadly, the rest maintained the queue, since they could not enjoy the quick service, like those three people.

In this fast-growing world of modernisation, where people of all cultures, races, classes, and languages blend, and do business, socialise, and race against people and time, it becomes a fertile ground to abuse the *wantok* system. To build a *wantok* system network in the blended society, seen today, a channel has to be created first, and that can be through the offering of bribes, doing favours, and the giving of gifts. There and then, the network is established, whereby kinship terms are employed to identify themselves as *wantoks*, regardless of different language groups, race, or geographical settings, to render services and favours. However, some are attracted to be *wantoks* by personalities, or by sharing of similar views and ideologies.

A person joining a group, who is willing to enter into a mutual relationship, in which he helps and is helped in these activities, may be called brother (a kinship term), even though, as far as blood relationship is concerned, he is an outsider.¹⁰ Kinship terms are employed to include people within their group, who would otherwise not be considered true kinsmen. It is this principle of extending kinship relationship indefinitely that forms the basis for the *wantok* system. But those who have existing kinship relationship have no need to establish that channel.

Moreover, reciprocity comes into perspective here, too. Where people know that their offers, favours, services, and gifts are to be returned, along that stream flow the favours, gifts, and services, whether it is towards the natural kin relationship, or the one established through the channels of corrupt means. This was the case with the security guard and the two

¹⁰ Mary MacDonal, “Melanesian Communities: Melanesian Institute Orientation Course” (Goroka PNG: Melanesian Institute, 1983), p. 1.

women, who were primary-school teachers. The guard expected those teachers to deal favourably with his daughter.

As a result, the *wantok* system, once a group-oriented system, which looked out for the needs and support for one another, has now become an avenue for personal gain, greed, and corruption. Individuals and groups have abused the system through bribery, offering of gifts, and doing favours to lure others to be *wantoks*, so they are assisted to gain what is not rightfully theirs, or occupy jobs and positions, for which they are not qualified.

Contemporary Wantok System – A Fertile Soil for Evil

The *wantok* system in the past was a group-oriented system. Concern for the well-being of others was of paramount importance. As a result, people benefited from each other. Unsuspecting *wantoks* were not being exploited or manipulated for others' benefit. However, that is not so today. Changes and developments are taking place at a fast rate, therefore, people need to cope with, or survive, through these changes and developments. People also compete to possess more materials, money, and power. So they entice others, through whatever means they can, to make them *wantoks*, so they can accomplish their plans and wishes. This means *wantok* relations are established outside of the normal kinship lines. Kinship terms are employed to gain access to possessions and positions. And, even when it comes to the distribution of wealth and services, offering of jobs, and political positions, and positions in the church, the first and the best cut is preserved for *wantoks*. These are not the only things. The availability of spaces for studies in learning institutions are no longer merit based. They are aligned towards *wantoks*.

One of the reasons behind the University of Goroka students going on strike at the beginning of 2010 was to decry the unfair selection of students to study at the university. Many children of academic staff, including students from one particular province, dominated the selection list.¹¹ In one of the articles in the daily newspapers, it called on the selectors in schools and learning institutions to ensure that applications were processed and

¹¹ *The National* (Papua New Guinea), February 16, 2010.

screened fairly. This call was made after a victim of the *wantok* system learned that many eligible candidates for further studies and places in higher learning institutions had been overlooked in favour of relatives of selectors. The relatives would have not made it, if there had been honesty.¹² Another news article reported the anger of a university student over the precedent of employers employing unqualified and bogus civil engineers, who were relatives and *wantoks*, who could not perform according to the demands for professional performance.¹³ People in influential and executive positions in the church, politics, and the public and private sectors have been offering jobs, incentives, and services of sorts to relatives and trading or business partners, so that they, in turn, will somehow benefit.

Another very good example was the outcry of the people of PNG, when their Prime Minister offered the Finance portfolio to his son, even though the son already had another powerful ministry of State Enterprises. More surprising was that there were members of Parliament in the government backbenches, who were more qualified than his son, yet the Prime Minister chose to appoint his son.¹⁴

On many occasions, bribery is offered and accepted to employ *wantok* or kinship terms, so that whatever is not their due will be given, or has to be taken away by those who claim to be *wantoks*. Pressures, and unrealistic expectations by *wantoks*, also obscure the paths of right procedures in the delivery of services, use of public funds, employment of qualified personnel to jobs and positions, and availability of spaces for higher learning institutions.

¹² *Ibid.*, April 13, 2010.

¹³ *Post Courier* (Papua New Guinea), June 24, 2010.

¹⁴ *The National* (Papua New Guinea), July 1, 2010.

EFFECTS OF THE *WANTOK* SYSTEM IN MELANESIA

Strengths

The *wantok* system is a Melanesian social security system. Toley says that the *wantok* system could be seen as an unwritten social contract.¹⁵ Those within this system know how to fulfil obligations under this unwritten social contract. For villages, it is an egalitarian way for the community to share its spoils. Within the clan and village, each person can expect to be fed and sheltered, and share in the community's assets. In rapidly-changing circumstances, the village and the clan provide basic economic support, as well as a sense of belonging.¹⁶ People respect and care for one another, and there is a spirit of oneness. Lawlessness (like stealing, breaking and entering, destruction of property, and disharmony) is minimal, because, whatever one owns, is seen to be for the benefit of everyone. By definition, the *wantok* system is an effective cultural bond that promotes and upholds Melanesian identity, oneness, support and security, care, sense of belonging, and reduces lawlessness.

Weaknesses

On the other side of the coin, the *wantok* system is somewhat darker, and has a pervasive influence in all sectors of society. The original face of the *wantok* system is being disfigured in contemporary Melanesia, in such a way that those who encounter the system for the first time, or are affected by it, look at the *wantok* system as being evil, manipulative, corrupt, encouraging poverty, nepotistic, and a system of unhealthy favouritism. It is so, because it makes others build their empires, and accumulate material wealth and possessions at the expense of *wantoks*. Laziness or idleness is common, as people depend on others for their survival. It has been the breeding ground for unprofessional and incompetent performance, greed, and self-centredness. Moreover, conflicts and divisions, in the competition for power and glory, at the expense of *wantoks*, seem to be rampant.

¹⁵ Henry Toley, "Wantok System", available from <file:///internet%20info.htm>, *Solomon Star*. Internet accessed August 12, 2009.

¹⁶ Rowan McKinnon, Jean-Bernard Carillet, and Dean Starnes, "The *Wantok* System: Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands", available from Lonelyplanet.com. Internet accessed March 17, 2010.

Unequal distribution of services and wealth becomes the accepted tradition. Some people groups are marginalised. Not only that, it also encourages retaliation. Those who are left out, and are affected by this system, somehow find their way into whatever place they can to try to stamp their authority. They then apply to others what had been applied to them – meaning that the practice of the *wantok* system branches out and spreads. But those who benefit from it will embrace it. Therefore, this perverted *wantok* system has now become man's unethical tool for personal gain and fame,¹⁷ at the same time, reducing others to poverty.

WANTOK SYSTEM IN THE CHURCH

CASE STUDY: SOUTH SEA EVANGELICAL CHURCH

The SSEC, from its humble beginnings among the Solomon Islands labourers in the Queensland sugar plantations around 1880, is now the third largest, and the fastest growing, church in the Solomon Islands, and has spread its wings across PNG.¹⁸ It has two regional offices in PNG – Brugam,¹⁹ catering for the MOMASE²⁰ region, and Gavuvu,²¹ for the New Guinea Islands (NGI), Highlands, and Southern regions. The SSEC PNG has approximately 50,000 members. Probably only ten per cent of members are committed Christians. The majority of members are somehow affiliated to the name SSEC, because it was the first denomination that reached their shores, or maybe their grandparents or parents were pioneers of SSEC in PNG. The majority of members are from the Sepik region, while a few come from other parts of the country. This has been due to the fact that missionaries from the first South Sea Evangelical Mission (SSEM) (now known as Pioneers) landed on their shores. SSEC has been in PNG for more than 60 years, but it has experienced stagnation in its

¹⁷ Ako Arua and Daniel J. Eka, "Wantok System", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 18-1 (2002), p. 9.

¹⁸ Micah Raoiasi, CLTC fourth-year student from Malaita, Solomon Islands. Interview by author by questionnaire, CLTC, April 20, 2010.

¹⁹ Regional headquarters for the MOMASE region, and located in East Sepik Province.

²⁰ MOMASE is an acronym for four provinces – MOrobe, MAdang, East and West SEpik.

²¹ Regional headquarters for New Guinea Islands (NGI), Highlands, and the Southern regions, and is located in Kimbe, West New Britain Province.

spiritual and physical growth.²² There have been many reasons behind it, and one of them is the *wantok* system. How does the *wantok* system affect, or contribute, to the stagnation, in its growth, both spiritually and physically?

TOLERANCE OF SIN

The general underlying idea of sin is that of law and a lawgiver (God). Hence, sin is everything in the disposition, purpose, and conduct of God's moral creatures, which is contrary to the moral will of God (Rom 3:20; 4:15; James 4:12, 17).²³ Or, in other words, it is everything that is against the holy nature and will of God. It is lawlessness (1 John 3:4).

Scripture is full of examples of God's wrath and discipline unleashed against sin. There are records of unbearable consequences upon people who sinned, or condoned sin. The following two biblical accounts are worth noting. They show how relatives, as *wantoks*, tolerated sin that brought on severe consequences.

1 Sam 2:12-36 is an account of Eli and his sons, who served as priests in Shiloh. His sons, despite being priests by birth, with all the priestly privileges, were wicked, and had no regard for the LORD. Their position was sacred and honourable, and obliged them, for the sake of their reputation, to observe decorum, but there never was any thought of all that. They profaned the offerings of the Lord, made gains for themselves, and gratified their own desire for luxury out of them.²⁴ This sin was great in the LORD's sight (1 Sam 2:17). Eli eventually rebuked them, but their sin had reached a point where God had to unleash judgment upon them. Eli's rebuke seemed to be weak; he never put them out of the priestly office. He

²² Establishments, like mission stations, Bible Schools, business arms, and the evangelising and membership from other ethnic groups within PNG, has been somewhat frustrating. Also, the spiritual growth of many Christians is at the lowest point.

²³ Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1966), p. 1028.

²⁴ Rick Meyers, e-Sword – the Sword of the Lord with an electronic edge, e-Sword Bible software [CD-ROM]; (www.e-sword.net, 2009).

never used his right as a father,²⁵ and also as a High Priest and the judge of Israel, to bring discipline, and deal with them and the evil, in which they were engaged. Since they were his sons, he honoured them, and tolerated their evil (1 Sam 2:29). The ensuing consequences were shocking, as seen in 1 Sam 2:31-36.

What about David, Israel's most decorated king? There is no record of King David taking any punitive action against his son Amnon for raping his daughter Tamar, who was Amnon's half-sister, and Absalom's full sister. The disciplinary leniency towards his son eventually led to the death of Amnon, and the revolts of Absalom and Adonijah,²⁶ which was the beginning of misery for his rulership as a father and as a king (2 Sam 13-20).

Cases of adultery, fornication, stealing, abuse of office, and the misappropriation of church funds and properties are common occurrences in SSEC, but how they are being dealt with by the respective levels of leadership has been a concern for many Christians from within the SSEC, and outside. Thus, tolerating of sin committed by *wantoks* has been one of the hindrances to the spiritual and physical growth of SSEC, because tolerance is sin, too. It contributes to the decline of moral ethics in the church, families, and communities. The splendour, majesty, power, and the glory of God that are supposed to shine forth from the church are no longer there. The church is focused on embracing its programs, doctrines, rituals, and formalities, instead of dealing appropriately with sin that hinders God's involvement and participation. Someone who is spiritually alive and sound will realise that God seems to have no interest in the affairs of a church that consciously or unconsciously tolerates evil.

²⁵ It was prescribed in the Ten Commandments that children were to honour their parents (Ex 20:5). Eli did not take advantage of that part of the constitution as an Israelite father to apply discipline.

²⁶ *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2008), p. 446.

DISCIPLINE

Discipline is a form of punishment, like suspension from duties, stripping of leadership and ministry powers, restitution, or excommunication, exerted on a Christian member or a church leader for committing offences of a public nature, which bring disrepute to themselves and the church.

In line with scripture, the SSEC has uphold discipline as one of its rods in guiding its flock to walk in the paths of righteousness, and to grow into maturity as true disciples of Christ. However, there are disparities in executing discipline at times. Sipa said: “Sometimes a strong and intimate relationship as *wantoks*, developed over time, prevents discipline from being executed honestly, as that will loosen the strong ties that had been valued among the leaders and Christians.”²⁷ Bakani also expressed the sentiments of inconsistency in the execution of discipline, where *wantoks*, despite the serious nature of an offence, are shown leniency, by being given a lesser penalty, while others incurred a heavier penalty. He said that, as a result, disunity, schism, mistrust, and chaos start to take root, thereby weakening and tarnishing the gospel, and the good name of the church.²⁸ Some even walk away from SSEC to join other denominations, or start alternative ministry movements. For example, there was a case where the wife of a District Superintendent was caught in an adulterous affair with one of the district church leaders. The accused leader was disciplined by the regional church council, and the husband was ordered to step down from his position and ministry by the same church authority. (The levels of church government and authority in SSEC PNG appear in Figure 1.)

²⁷ Kialo Sipa, Bible school teacher, Kimbe. Interview by author by questionnaire, CLTC, May 7, 2010.

²⁸ Anton Bakani, SSEC New Guinea Islands Regional Superintendent, Kimbe. Interview by author by questionnaire, CLTC, May 7, 2010.

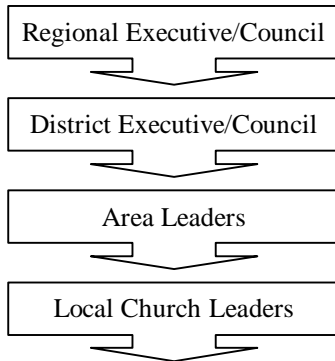


Figure 1: Level of church government and authority in SSEC PNG

However, the area- and the local-church leaders defied the instructions, by allowing the husband to continue in ministry, because they were from the same geographical settings, and spoke the same vernacular. This resulted in a schism in the local churches in that area.²⁹ Sela also recounts an event where a senior pastor was disciplined, in the form of suspension, for adultery. The assistant pastor in that church took over the post. However, a few months later, the District Superintendent reinstated the adulterous pastor, because they were related. Hence, the assistant pastor pulled out from that church, and so did his *wantoks*, admirers, and those faithful Christians, who were against both the unholy act of the accused pastor and that of the District Superintendent.³⁰

Moreover, responses to evangelism in communities become hindered as the non-believers see believers not walking the talk, or living what they preach. Non-believers and backsliders are, therefore, unresponsive to the gospel that is being preached, when they see pastors, church leaders, and Christians with tainted testimonies, continuing to serve in ministries under the approval of leaders and church members, who are *wantoks*.

²⁹ The name, which region, district, area, and local churches identify as the levels of church government and authority in SSEC PNG.

³⁰ Roy Sela, CLTC first-year student from SSEC in Sepik. Interview by author, CLTC, September 8, 2009.

Moreover, there are situations, where church leaders restore *wantoks* to their former positions and ministries as soon as their term of discipline expires. However, those who are not *wantoks* are asked to start all over again to regain their reputation. Criticism, mistrust, doubts, and divisions have risen over such treatment by the church leadership.

Thus, when the church ignores, or deals with sin and questionable issues lightly, does it enjoy the presence of God? It is impossible, as righteousness and wickedness, light and darkness, Christ and Satan, the temple of God and idols, have no common harmony and fellowship (2 Cor 6:14-16). The church becomes boring. There is no inviting flavour of the Spirit, as spiritual dryness takes its toll. The increase of ungodliness is experienced as people in the church are not rebuked, corrected, taught, and guided in the way of righteousness.

DISCIPLESHIP

Discipleship is entering into a lifelong relationship with Jesus. It is a radical way of life, radical in obedience to the will of God.³¹ It is not merely learning or knowing the truth, or keeping the rules, but it is living the teachings of the Master Teacher (Christ) without reservation.

The SSEC is one of the churches in PNG where church members, affiliated through *wantoks* or ethnic groups, or those attached by kinship relations, fill the seats of church buildings on Sundays, while there are very few disciples. Another issue is that of the allegiance of Christians to leaders and pastors, who are their *wantoks*. There is a trend for people flock to churches led or pastored by one of their own folk, or someone who might share their views and ideologies, or are being attracted by the leaders' personalities. When this happens, the one who leads that church becomes proud, and boasts about the number of participants. However, he does not realise the spiritual burden of that church. The church becomes like a truck carrying heavy logs that cannot move uphill due to the load. Most of them

³¹ David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol 2 (New York NY: Doubleday Dell, 1992), pp. 208-209.

cannot walk as true disciples of Christ, and even do not know the responsibilities of a Christian.

The only things they contribute to the church are their problems, which, at times, explode and become a disaster in the church. Often, too, pastors, or whoever leads the church, ignore rebuking and correcting *wantoks* for fear of offending them. But the scripture is very clear on that. It is better to honour God than man (1 Sam 2:29; Acts 4:19). Also, when *wantoks* are involved in the physical well-being of a pastor, it is most likely their actions that need to be rebuked. However, correction will often be ignored, as the pastor fears the withdrawal of *wantoks*' support. Malachi was angry with the priests, because, although they were to be God's messengers, they did not know God's will. The priests had allowed influential and favoured people to break the law. The priests were so dependent on these people for support that they could not afford to confront them when they did wrong (Mal 2:1-17). Therefore, when people, who claim to be Christians, consciously or unconsciously do wrong things, they are kept immature in their discipleship walk, because they are not rebuked and corrected.

Furthermore, pastors normally share their responsibilities with believers who are mature disciples. But, in such cases, where a church is full of members, affiliated through *wantoks* and ethnic groups, how can such members contribute responsibly to the ministries of the church, when they will have no feelings of conviction and obligation? How can they effectively live the teachings of Christ, too? Only as a true disciple of Christ will one feel the sense of Christian responsibility. As a result, a church, which should be bubbling with discipleship traits, becomes preoccupied with issues and activities that are unlike what the church of God should be like.

LEADERSHIP APPOINTMENTS

What is leadership? Leadership comes in many varieties and intensities. It is sometimes defined as the ability to create in others the desire to follow.³² Anane explains it as follows

Leadership has been described as the process of social influence, in which one person is able to enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task. Leadership is ultimately about creating a way for people to contribute to making something extraordinary happen. Leadership is a way of focusing and motivating a group, to enable them to achieve their aims. It also involves being accountable to, and responsible for, the group as a whole. Ideally, a leader should be a few steps ahead of their team, but not too far for the team to be able to understand and follow them.³³

As leadership plays a major role in the growth, stability, and sustainability of the SSEC, the sad reality is that too often the process of choosing leaders in the four levels of church government has been somewhat biased. Christians are electing leaders along kinship lines, or ethnic groups, or people with whom they share similar views and ideologies, which is against the scriptural guidelines of 1 Tim 3:3-12 and Titus 1:6-9.³⁴ Nor have they given a second thought to answering questions like, what is leadership? Does scripture give guidelines for choosing church leaders? What about the testimonies, spiritual maturity, qualifications, spiritual gifts, and talents? Should a person not be measured against some of these qualities to be chosen as a church leader?

Kwara³⁵ shares the situation where leadership in the United church in Central Province is being manipulated by *wantoks* and ethnicity. When

³² Ronald A. Beers, et al, "Leadership, God's Word on", in *iLumina Bible and Encyclopaedia* software, CD-ROM (Tyndale House Publishers: www.tyndale.com), 2003.

³³ Kofi Anane-Fenin, "Leadership Seminar", Banz PNG: CLTC, February 26, 2009.

³⁴ These two scripture passages outline the qualifications for church leadership.

³⁵ Timothy Kwara, Assistant Dean of DTE, and United church member. Interview by author by questionnaire, CLTC, April 13, 2010.

voting for the bishop, ministers and delegates often vote for their *wantok* candidates. Deacons, at the congregation level, are also chosen along clan lines. Those who are selected often lack leadership qualities. Schmalzef, in his observations, identified that leadership in SSEC has been all about ethnic identity. Practical conditions, such as spiritual maturity, spiritual gifts, faithfulness, honesty, educational qualifications, and life testimony are often of secondary, or least, importance.³⁶ Having a relative or *wantok* at the helm of the church hierarchy is what matters most. Hence, the principal foundation of being a multi-racial church is now being distorted, and the church is degenerating into a family and *wantok* enterprise, thereby defeating its purpose of being neutral.

Strengths

Despite its negativity, the *wantok* system has some positive impacts in the leadership functions of the church. Disagreements and disunity in decision-making, or other church matters, are rare.³⁷ When there are factions or ethnic groups competing to make a name for best performance during their term of office in leadership roles, *wantoks* are most likely to contribute finances, other resources, and moral support, to shoulder the responsibilities to bring changes. This is due to the Melanesian culture of embracing titles and status without questioning the reputation of whatever group the leader may be affiliated to. Thus, it encourages changes and developments in the church. Moreover, the leaders can be kept under check (accountable) by *wantoks* for the sake of the reputation of the ethnic group, family, or clan.

Weaknesses

As a result of the *wantok* system, the neutrality of the administrative and leadership functions of the church is being distorted and weakened, to an extent where the honesty, dignity, and credibility of the church offices are brought into disrepute. It has caused infighting, backsliding, and schism,

³⁶ Ulrich Schmalzef, missionary with the SSEC for more than 10 years. Interview by author by email, CLTC, May 5, 2010.

³⁷ Godfrey Lanis, CLTC fourth-year student from Maprik, East Sepik. Interview by author by questionnaire, CLTC, April 20, 2010.

leading to walkouts to other denominations by some factions, or to form alternative or parachurch ministry movements that are now becoming the order of the church.³⁸ Moreover, some Christians, who do not have their *wantoks* serving in leadership roles, are reluctant to contribute money and other resources for the administrative functions of the church, and its ministries. The general performance of leaders, and people appointed through *wantokism*, has been incompetent, unprofessional, substandard, and ineffective.

APPOINTMENTS FOR MINISTRIES AND TRAINING

The appointment of people to certain ministries, training, and other aspects of church life, has, on certain occasions, been characterised by the *wantok* system. Leaders, without engaging in proper consultation, choose people, to whom they are related, despite the appointees' lacking the appropriate qualifications on both spiritual and physical fronts.

Some ministries in the churches are sought after for the benefits and privileges, influence, and the recognition that come with them. One such example is the pastoral post in urban centres, sometimes known as "town pastor". In urban centres, if the church is in a better position financially, they can afford to pay their pastor exceptionally well, provide decent accommodation, meet the children's school fees, and take care of other bills. So, it is likely this pastoral post will be awarded to pastors who are somehow related to the decision-makers.

Training is another area where an applicant's association with leaders is paramount. Normally, institutions, like the Christian Leaders' Training College (CLTC) seriously require church recommendations when assessing applicants. So, in SSEC, for those who want to apply to come to CLTC, it is a serious struggle, because of favouritism being played by church leaders in making recommendations. By God's grace, very few make it through.

³⁸ Fangalea, "An Analytical Evaluation of the Spirituality of the South Sea Evangelical church in the Solomon Islands", p. 16.

These are some of the situations experienced in the SSEC, when one person, family, or ethnic group happens to control most, or sometimes all, of the key leadership positions within the church. Hence, the equal representation in ministries, training, and other aspects of church life, are pushed beyond reach, as the *wantok* system takes away the value of equal opportunity, and merit-based appointments and participation. Injustice, unfairness, hatred, and conflicts are promoted, and will lead to divisions.

EXPLORING WANTOK SYSTEM ISSUES IN THE BIBLE

WANTOK SYSTEM – AN ISSUE IN THE BIBLE

All scripture is God-breathed, and is useful (2 Tim 3:16). It is holy, infallible, active, and alive in its entirety. One of the beauties of scripture is that it contains many failures of the people of the Bible. This does not mean that those failures are condoned, but are recorded so that lessons can be learned from them, and people can avoid such behaviour and practices. They were recorded to teach us, to encourage us, and to warn us, so that we can be filled with hope (Rom 15:4). One such example is that of Jacob's life – a life filled with deceit and favouritism.

Favouritism, therefore, is treating one person or group better than others in an unfair way. Moreover, favouritism features the characteristics of the *wantok* system, so it will be discussed in the study of some of the biblical characters below.

CASE STUDY

Jacob – Rebecca's Favourite

Because of favouritism, Rebecca, through deceit, caused the blessings to fall on her favourite son Jacob, instead of Esau. Wood said that it was trust that caused Rebecca to love Jacob. She did not trust Esau, suggesting she did not love him.³⁹ However, that is doubtful, because the scriptures never mention anything about trust deciding Rebecca's actions. Since scripture reveals Jacob to be an indoor man, he would have been with his mother helping out with all the household chores. By contrast, Esau was an

³⁹ Derek Wood, *The Jacob Portfolio* (Leicester UK: IVP, 1990), p. 40.

outdoor man, who did not attract his mother's attention as much. Moreover, it must have been Jacob's personality that caused her to favour him. Anyway, whatever it was, the blessings that were promised to Jacob (Gen 25:20-23) would have been received in some good way. But Rebecca, finite, as all humans are, distrusted God, and allowed favouritism to override her patience to wait on the LORD for the promise to be fulfilled. Rebecca helped obtain the blessings for her favourite son through deceit, but, sadly, this led to trouble and sorrow.⁴⁰

The ensuing consequences of such favouritism were devastating. She never saw her favourite son again. It is believed that, while Jacob was still in Haran, his dear mother died. Jacob had to leave the comfort of home and family to flee as a fugitive (Gen 28:5). The bitter pill Jacob applied to Esau was repeated on him by his uncle Laban, who changed his wages on several occasions (Gen 29:22-25; 31:41). He became a slave-like servant for 20 years (Gen 31:38-41). Looking at Rebecca's actions brings into perspective that the *wantok* system, and its consequences, are as old as human society itself.

Joseph – Jacob's Favourite

The blood of favouritism from his mother was fervently flowing in Jacob. Jacob had two wives – Leah and Rachel. Rachel became his favourite, despite not bearing him children, but, in Jacob's old age, she bore him Joseph and Benjamin. That favouritism gave rise to Leah and Rachel competing for Jacob's affection.

Now Jacob had 12 sons by his two wives and their two handmaidens. Joseph was Jacob's favourite son, since he was the first-born of Rachel – his favourite wife. Jacob showed this favouritism so openly, by believing bad reports Joseph made against his brothers (Gen 37:2), that the other brothers became jealous of Joseph. To add fuel to the fire, Jacob made a richly-ornamented robe for Joseph (Gen 37:3). Swindoll assumed that,

⁴⁰ Ronald F. Youngblood, ed., *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* [CD-ROM] (Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson, 1997). Available from the Logos Library System Software.

since Jacob was a passive father, he had difficulty dealing with the other 11 sons, who were hard to handle. Therefore, he favoured the one who was easy to deal with, and a delight to his heart.⁴¹ He based his assumptions on the case where Shechem was annihilated by Jacob's other sons, for which Jacob was furious. Jacob never had the courage to deal with them. However, scripture plainly outlines the reason behind Jacob's practice of favouritism on Joseph, which negates this assumption. Scripture reveals that Joseph was born to Jacob, in his old age, by his favourite wife, so he became Jacob's favourite (Gen 37:3).

The resulting consequences of that favouritism were painful, heartbreaking, and excruciatingly humiliating, for both Jacob and Joseph. The ten brothers plotted to kill Joseph, but, instead, sold him to a caravan of traders on their way to Egypt. They took Joseph's robe, dipped it in the blood of a goat, and took it to their father, telling him that they had found the robe. Jacob recognised the robe he had given his son, and concluded that he was dead. Jacob was heartbroken and grief-stricken, and would not be comforted. Joseph, on the other hand, was sold as a slave to a faraway land. He was separated from his family, especially his father, and small brother Benjamin. Joseph was also falsely accused and imprisoned. Obviously, this family was a family riddled with anger, strife, jealousy, deceit, resentment, and rifts, as members struggled for recognition. These were all triggered when Jacob played favourites with Rachel, and her son Joseph. What would have happened if Jacob had treated his 12 sons equally?

EARLY CHURCH EVANGELISM

Christ gave a commission to His followers in Jerusalem to take the gospel message, and be witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). However, for reasons known to those who took this command, they did not obey it. Maybe the followers of Christ in Jerusalem, or the Jews, never wanted to have any part with the Gentiles, for they regarded any dealings with the Gentiles to be an abomination.

⁴¹ Charles R. Swindoll, *The Man of Integrity and Forgiveness: Joseph* (Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson Word Publishing, 1998), p. 10.

Nonetheless, the gospel message was for all – both the Jews and Gentiles, as laid out by Christ in His commission (Acts 1:8). Since it was the message of salvation, and about God’s kingdom, the Jewish mentality was that it was for them only. Therefore, evangelism was concentrated in Jerusalem, where the Jewish *wantoks* were. This was not right before God. Consequently, God allowed great persecution to break out in the church in Jerusalem, and all, except the apostles, were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria (Acts 8). From this event, God accomplished two things. Firstly, God used the means of persecution to let the gospel spread. Secondly, God made it clear that the gospel is for all, and not for any favoured race or group. In other words, anything that is for the benefit of all should be for all, and not be concentrated around *wantoks*.

RECOMMENDATION – THE WAY TO MOVE FORWARD

Just as treachery is valued and idealised by the Sawi tribe of West Papua of Indonesia,⁴² and individualism is the lifestyle of the Western world, so the *wantok* system is the lifeblood of Melanesians.

From a brief history, the *wantok* system is said to have developed during the nomadic period, when our ancestors learned to share their catches of the wild with one another. They watched out for each other against enemies. They hunted as a group; they roamed as a group – they did everything as a group. By the time they learned to cultivate land, farm, grow food, and settle, nothing had changed.⁴³ And it has become a core part of Melanesian culture ever since. From the way things are done today through the *wantok* system, it is indeed a very complex system, interwoven into the lifestyles of Melanesians, both within and without the church. For it to be undone, is an impossible task.

However, since this thesis has used the SSEC as its case study on the effects of the *wantok* system, this section will propose a number of

⁴² Don Richardson, *Peace Child* (Ventura CA: Regal Books, 2005), p. 31.

⁴³ “*Wantok* and *Wantokism*”, available from <http://pnglife.blogspot.com/2005/01/wantoks.html>. Internet accessed August 15, 2009.

suggestions on how the SSEC can attempt to identify the negative effects of the *wantok* system, and address them meaningfully in the church.

SIN

Paul likens sin to yeast in 1 Cor 5:6-8. If a person came into contact with a corpse, and then touched holy things, the defilement spread (Hag 2:13). Just as yeast spreads through the dough, and, likewise, defilement, by coming into contact with the corpse, so does sin and its effects in the community of God's people (church), if unchecked.

Looking at the historical examples of the ignorance of priest Eli and King David, of the evil that grew in their houses, and its ensuing consequences, should rightly instill fear. Tolerating known sin in the church by *wantoks* is like putting leaven into the Passover Feast, where it does not belong. As the leaven made the Passover Feast unholy, so does sin in the church.

1 Cor 5 surely is the way to go with the necessity for punitive action in a church, when one of the members, despite being a *wantok*, has committed serious sin of a public nature. Discipline is necessary for the church to retain its holy character in the eyes of the world, and also so that the Holy Spirit may work in the midst of the church without being grieved.⁴⁴ The fear of offending and severing ties with *wantoks* should not stand in the way of severely dealing with serious sin of a public nature. It is better to please God by maintaining holiness in the church than to honour man and evil (1 Sam 2:29; Acts 4:19). God does not show favouritism (Deut 10:17; Acts 10:34). He dealt a surprise blow to Moses, his faithful servant, by forbidding him to enter the Promised Land, because of disobedience (Deut 32:50-52). If God dealt with the smallest of sins, like the disobedience by Moses, how much more will He take action against churches who tolerate sin? King David, who was said to be a man after God's heart, faced the serious consequences of rebellion and uprising in his house for knowingly tolerating his son Amnon's evil.

⁴⁴ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments* [computer file], electronic edition, Logos Library System (Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson, 1997). Available from CD-ROM.

Therefore, the SSEC needs to fervently deal with sin – whether it be by suspension, excommunication, or the stripping of ministry power and position – rather than tolerating it, and dealing favourably with sinning *wantoks*. If this is not done, it will bring on God’s discipline in the form of spiritual dryness, and other unexpected negative situations in church life.

DISCIPLESHIP – CENTRAL AIM

The making of disciples is the inner core of the Great Commission of Jesus Christ (Matt 28:19-20). A church without disciples is like someone owning a bank passbook without money. Just as money in the passbook is useful to the owner, so are disciples in the church. When there are committed disciples in the church, the power of God is displayed, and Christ is reflected. The light of Christ shines out from the church to the world. But, when churches are filled with nominal Christians, and members affiliated through *wantoks*, those churches leave a lot to be desired. Even the central purpose of discipleship fades, as allegiance to leaders and pastors comes to the forefront. Paul strongly rebukes this attitude in 1 Cor 3:1-9 by labelling them as worldly people – not disciples of Christ.

Since the SSEC is an evangelical church, as the name portrays, it has aggressively launched out on evangelism, but how has it fared in the area of discipleship? Again, a church full of converts will make no impact in the community, but one full of disciples will. Discipleship is equally as important as evangelism; hence the SSEC has to take the same approach of aggressiveness to sound discipleship teaching in its local churches, founded on scripture. They could conduct discipleship courses on a regular basis. With gentleness, they could confront and rebuke Christians, whose actions are unbecoming for a disciple. Moreover, the idea and the system of being a church member affiliated through *wantoks* has to be renounced, in the strongest terms possible, because it does not help the church fulfil its purpose.

THE CHOOSING OF LEADERS

If one studies the anatomy and physiology of human beings, he or she will realise that the skeleton, which gives shape and structure to the body,

somehow functions directly or indirectly out of the main column, which is the spine. A spineless being is abnormal, and he or she will be restricted from many activities, functions, and creativity. Leadership is the spine of any organisation. It plays a significant role in the growth, stability, and sustainability of it. This is the same in the SSEC. Without leadership, there is no direction and guidance. Without the spine, there are no normal activities and functions of the human-body structure.

The SSEC PNG conducts its elections to choose leaders after every four-year term. That means, whoever is elected to any leadership positions in the church will serve out four years. For instance, the regional conference elects the leaders for the region, the highest level of the SSEC leadership structure. Those who are elected at this level are the key people, because they make most of the decisions for the general well-being and running of the church.

However, as mentioned previously, the process, in which the leaders at the regional level are chosen, has been somewhat unbiblical. Looking out for, and voting for, *wantok* candidates has been the order of most elections. Consequently, the performances by those chosen through such means have been below par. As Narokobi said:

True leadership is a precious gift, and it should be conferred upon those who can be used to serve God and His people. Leadership should be conferred to people who live and practise spiritual values and qualities. It should be conferred on someone with moral convictions and courage to face up to challenges, and accepts the consequences of his/her actions. It should be conferred on people, who will diagnose the flaws of the church or society, and take steps to redress the wrongs, and remain uncompromising in the fundamental moral and spiritual values.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Bernard Narokobi, *The Melanesian Way* (Suva Fiji: Institute of PNG and Pacific Studies, 1983), p. 121.

Therefore, it is of paramount importance to have a strategy in place on how to identify candidates to vie for leadership positions at that level. Hausep,⁴⁶ when interviewed on his view regarding the leadership issue in SSEC, raised one such strategy as to have an eldership board made up of very senior, well-respected people of high spiritual and social standing, both in the church and community, who have retired from active church ministries. This board can screen the intending candidates against a set of conditions and requirements that should be set up as a guide. They will then propose those shortlisted to the general conference for election through secret ballot. Most importantly, the members of this board will have to be very honest, impartial, and God-fearing.

Secondly, two to three months prior to the general conference, aggressive awareness has to be made in the districts, areas, and local churches about the duties and responsibilities, and the importance, of leadership. That includes profound biblical teaching on the qualifications of church leaders, outlined by Paul in 1 Tim 3:3-12 and Titus 1:6-9, and other teaching, on the part Christians can play relating to leadership.

Thirdly, prior to the general conference, leadership seminars and courses should be conducted, so that there will be some light shed on what leadership is all about, and what is expected of them.

These are some practical suggestions, so as to avoid the habit of picking anybody, especially relatives and *wantoks*, among the delegates of the general conference at the 11th hour to run for regional leadership positions without proper knowledge of the person.

Leadership in the SSEC, therefore, should not be about *wantoks* at the helm of the church hierarchy, but it should be about the functionality and the well-being of church life. The choosing of *wantoks* has had many detrimental effects. The SSEC PNG, by now, should wake up to the godly approach in selecting its leaders.

⁴⁶ Charles Hausep, CLTC fourth-year student from SSEC in Kimbe. Interview by author, CLTC, July 9, 2010.

MINISTRY POSITIONS

Just as leadership is crucially vital to the life of the church, so are the church ministry positions like pastors, youth leaders, Sunday school teachers, Women's Fellowship coordinators, Bible School teachers, and other support staff in respective missions or church centres. There has to be some kind of very critical assessment of who is being appointed, and how they might perform. In many situations, those appointed through the *wantok* system lack qualifications, stamina, and the spiritual willpower to serve God and His church. One has to be chosen, not because of where he or she comes from, or from the point of relationship, but should take into account the spiritual maturity, qualifications, and a testimony that is of reputable standing. A very good example is seen in the early church in Acts 6:1-6. As the number of disciples increased, they started having problems in the distribution of food to the widows. Since this was another ministry to deal with rations (to the widows), the apostles urged the disciples to choose those who were known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom (v. 3). The apostles would be committed to the ministry of praying and preaching. Verse 5 presents the names of those chosen, which, indeed, is a beautiful representation of both Jews and Greeks, as the names identify. There was no *wantok* system. Only the godly were chosen.

Though people of these qualities are few, the church should work tirelessly to identify Christians, to train and equip them, rather than appointing relatives and *wantoks*, with questionable characters, testimonies, and spiritualities. Experience indicates that such blunders by respective leaders, or people groups, have wrecked what was supposed to be a church that is united, holy, fulfilling, and vibrant in serving its purpose. Therefore, honesty, impartiality, or fair representation, in appointing Christians to church ministries should take precedence over relatives and *wantoks*.

CHURCH AS A NEW WANTOK COMMUNITY

The negative aspects of *wantokism*, both in the secular world and the church (SSEC), have been explored in the previous section. This section will discuss the strengths and the beauty of *wantokism* in the church.

The early church, as seen in the book of Acts, comprised people from different races, classes, and ages, yet they understood that they were members of one family. Out of that understanding, they devoted themselves to prayer, fellowship, the breaking of bread with gladness, and they were together, and had everything in common (Acts 2:42-45). There was the sharing of wealth to meet needs, which was a bearing of one another's burdens, as urged by Paul in Gal 6:2.⁴⁷ The bearing of burdens and meeting of needs were only within the Christian community, and not just anybody in need. Viertel said that the first church, or Christian community, willingly shared with each other believer.⁴⁸ They were never forced. These people became *wantoks* – meaning that they had everything in common. They spoke the same kingdom language, performed kingdom activities of prayer, fellowship, and breaking of bread, with one accord. There is no record of exploitation and manipulation of the members in the new family. As a result, there was no needy person, as each member's needs were met accordingly (Acts 4:34-35). There was much joy in the new family, and many more were added to their number. Concern for others flowed naturally. Sharing was voluntary. No one took advantage of other members for self-gain. That was the kind of *wantok* system practised in the infant and early church. A similar principle was the foundation of the traditional Melanesian *wantok* system.

This is the kind of *wantok* system needed in modern churches. Christians should rightly be *wantoks*, for they belong to the same kingdom and family of God. Division, racial discrimination, favouritism, nepotism, partiality,

⁴⁷ Ray C. Stedman, *Birth of the Body: Acts 1-12* (Santa Ana CA: Vision House, 1974), p. 96.

⁴⁸ Weldon E. Viertel, *Early Church Growth: New Testament Studies* (El Paso TX: Carib Baptist Publications, 1973), p. 25.

and class distinctions were foreign to the early church. Anything of such nature was swiftly addressed (Acts 6:1-6).

APPLICATION

This section will present the Bible's stand on the *wantok* system, or favouritism, as it is normally known in the scriptures, as part of its application.

Scripture has dealt with the issues of favouritism (*wantok* system) by exposing the painful and humiliating experiences of some biblical characters. Not only that, but scripture also condemned the practice. Favouritism, in biblical times, seemed to have its roots in family settings, especially in the conception stages of the nation of Israel. Favouritism destabilised family relationships, and encouraged family feuds, as family members sought recognition and affection.

LESSONS TO LEARN

Favouritism encourages divisions, hatred, bitterness, and family feuds. It deprives human beings, who are made in the image of God, of dignity. It demeans one's capabilities, talents, and gifts that are supposed to be utilised for God's glory, and for edifying others. The relationship and fellowship towards God and fellow man is distorted. Those who play favourites lose the trust of others.

All forms of favouritism are strictly renounced in scripture. Examples in scripture include fair application of the law between the poor and the rich in the court of law (Ex 23:3; Lev 19:15), the public rebuke of Christians who sin (1 Tim 5:20-21), providing hospitality (James 2:1-9), upholding people's rights (Is 10:2), and not showing partiality to people who offer bribes (Deut 10:17). God rebukes those who show favouritism, because there is no favouritism with Him (Acts 10:34; Rom 2:11; Eph 6:9).

GENERAL APPLICATION

After going through all the effects of the *wantok* system, both in the secular and church settings, the writing is clear that the unrealistic *wantok* system

(favouritism) is a breaking of God's law, and is evil (James 2:9), and brings pain, division, anger, and many other detrimental effects, like destabilising family relationships, and suffering.

Since the *wantok* system is one mode of spreading corruption in society, Christians are urged to contribute effectively in combating this evil by being impartial, honest, fair, trustworthy, and reliable. They should carry out their duties in whatever fields and professions they serve, without fear and favour. Preaching against it will be a daunting task, but living it out will speak volumes; as the saying goes, "actions speak louder than words".

Moreover, the churches should be the last place for the *wantok* system to be practised, because they should be places where righteousness, fairness, and impartiality should rule or flourish. In the choosing of church leaders and other ministers, let the biblically-acceptable standards be followed. In this way, God will be glorified and honoured. In dealing with sin, let no partiality and tolerance come in its way. Since God hates sin, so should His church. It does not mean that the church will be totally free from sin, but the church should be mindful of sin's deadly effects, and aggressively deal with it.

How about the parent and child relationship? Parents have to be very careful in how they treat their children. Favouring one child over another is deadly. It will cause hatred and division among the siblings, and even the affected child's relationship with the parents will be uncomfortable.

Therefore, with all these before us, Christians must take a bold stand to somehow fight this ugly giant (*wantok* system) that is directly, or indirectly, corroding society of honesty and fairness. Churches should make it their priority to address it. More teaching from the scriptures against this evil should be propagated. Moreover, churches can unite to address it, by aggressive awareness, just like what has been done with corruption awareness, because the *wantok* system and corruption are inseparable. Therefore, if the *wantok* system is not deterred, the rate of corruption, which is already uncontrollable, will increase, and the damage it causes, will be incalculable.

CONCLUSION

Since the *wantok* system was and is the lifeblood of Melanesians, it has been a cancer that has been embraced, but, because its effects are continually ignored, it is killing Melanesian society. It is reducing people to poverty, and encourages greed and laziness. Nepotism is beyond control, with corruption at its highest peak, fuelled by the *wantok* system.

This article has discussed and compared the traditional and contemporary *wantok* system, with its strengths and weaknesses. As the *wantok* system affects every sector of society, including churches, the SSEC was taken as a case study to see how its spiritual and physical development is affected. The issues of leadership, evangelism, sin, ministry appointments, and discipleship were some of the points discussed. Moreover, favouritism, since it displays the traits of the *wantok* system, was discussed, and scriptures presented, with its condemnation of the practice. Recommendations were then made on how to go about eradicating this cancerous system that is affecting both the church and the organisations and institutions in the secular world.

Melanesian Christians are, therefore, encouraged to stand up for what is right before God and man to fight this gargantuan evil (unrealistic *wantok* system), in all sectors of society, in whatever ways possible.

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A BIBLICAL CRITIQUE OF THE YUNA PEOPLES' BELIEF IN *HONE HEWA* *TAWALIPA*, THE GREAT SPIRIT

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is written to deal with the problem that the second- and third-generation Yuna people do not take the gospel message seriously, as did their fathers. In the book, *The Tree of Life*, the author states, "Recent studies have proven that the belief and teaching of savage tribes, living without a vestige of religion, as to be mere travellers' tales."¹ This means that belief in gods, or a God, is not foreign to such tribes, therefore, it cannot be ruled out as an unknown idea. Peter Ballard supports the view with a quote from Father Wilhelm Schmidt:

The Origin of the Idea of God, first published in 1912, to postulate a primitive monotheism at the dawn of human existence, a monotheism later overlaid by polytheistic beliefs, and yet preserved in recognisable form in the religions of primitive peoples. . . . Thus, a reversal of the usual position of those who have been influenced by evolutionary theory. . . . In any event, it is a striking fact that many primitive cultures have a belief in some sort of High God, even though there, very often, is no specific ritual directed towards such a Being.²

¹ G. W. Trompf, C. E. Loeliger, and J. Kadiba, eds, *Religion in Melanesia* (Port Moresby PNG: University of Papua New Guinea, 1982), p. 18.

² Peter Ballard, *Similarities in Primitive Beliefs in an All-Powerful God*. Available at <http://www.peterballard.org/index.html>. Accessed on April 22, 2009.

Based on these thoughts, from evidences within the Yuna culture, and from the Bible, this paper will try to convince today's generation of Yuna men, women, and children that *Hone Hewa Tawalipa* of the Yuna, through the ages past, was none other than the God of the Bible. Evidences within Yuna culture will be discussed, and comparisons made, to demonstrate this to the reader. The questions that this paper will grapple with, in contradiction to the theory of evolution, is why would people dream of, and search for, light that they did not know about? Why would primitive Yuna people fear and believe in such a Being if there was none? Why would people act and react in the way they did if there was no Person or power out there? Those walking in darkness would agree that, if they sense something or someone in the dark, they would soon realise the reality of it being maybe a tree, a hole, an animal, or a person. The people of primitive cultures in Melanesia, who believed in a Supreme Being, had their minds clouded by the belief in every other dark, evil spirit of this world, but they would still yearn for peace and freedom from their fear. Why hope or yearn at all for freedom and peace if there was no answer for it? Yuna people's belief in *Hone Hewa Tawalipa* was no exception.

THE YUNA PEOPLE AND THEIR BELIEF IN A SUPREME SPIRIT

This section introduces the Yuna people, their location, and their belief in a Supreme Spirit. The Hala Yuna³ people live along the Muller Range, along the Strickland and Pori Rivers, in the Hela Province of Papua New Guinea. In mythology, they are related to the Hela Huli to the south, to the Hela Duguba located southwest of Southern Highlands Province, and to the Hela Opena people of Enga to the east. The Strickland Gorge, well known since the 1950s, lies in the land of the Yuna.⁴ The first white man entered the land of the Yuna as recently as 1954.⁵ The Yuna share their borders with

³ The *Huli*, pronounce an "e", while the Yuna pronounce an "a" for the same word *Hela* or *Hala*.

⁴ J. P. Sinclair, *Behind the Ranges: Patrolling in Papua New Guinea* (Carlton Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1966), pp. 108-109.

⁵ *Ibid.* The land of the Yuna was discovered in 1954, and this discovery caught worldwide attention, describing it as, "the discovery of a lost Shangrila" in the Papuan wilds, peopled by thousands of primitives, who had never seen a white man.

the Hewa and the Ipili people, towards the east⁶, the Kalai people to the west, and the Min people to the north – beyond the Lagaip River, which meets the Strickland River flowing into the Fly River. These four peoples: the Huli, Yuna, Opena, and Duguba, are sons of the same ancestor Hela,⁷ but they all speak different languages. They have their own spirits, and their own styles of worship.

However, there is one particular Spirit that has remained a mystery over the centuries for the Yuna, as it has for the Hela Huli⁸ and the Hela Opena. The Yuna people called Him *Hone Hewa*.⁹ *Hewa* is the Yuna word for “the sun”; the other name used for him was *Tawalipa*.¹⁰ The Hela Huli called Him *Datagaliwabe*.¹¹ *Hone Hewa* was, however, used outside the house, as one who judges, who sees all, and knows all, gives protection, and is eternal, while *Tawalipa* was used inside the house, as a guard who knows where one sleeps, and hears every conversation. His presence was believed to be in the centre post that supports every other part of the structure. All other parts of the house touch this central piece. For convenience sake, we will refer to this Supreme Spirit as *Hone Hewa Tawalipa* in this paper.

⁶ *Ipili* people are the *Hela Opena*, and are brothers of the *Huli*, *Yuna*, and *Duguba* people.

⁷ Geshon Pokono, “Missionary Endeavour Towards the Tribal People of Hela Huli and its Challenges for Missions”, B.Th. thesis, Banz PNG: CLTC, October 2007.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ This name was used while outside, when the sun was visible, to refer to the Supreme Spirit as all-knowing and all-seeing, thus proving Yuna belief in a place and a presence beyond the visible sky.

¹⁰ This name was used inside the house, anytime, referring to the Supreme Spirit as the all-seeing, all-knowing, loving, a good listener, and providing security.

¹¹ Robert M. Glasse, *The Huli of Papua: A Cognatic Descent System* (Paris France: Mouton & Co, 1968), p. 21. Glasse, a German anthropologist, studied *Hela Huli* culture in the 1950s.

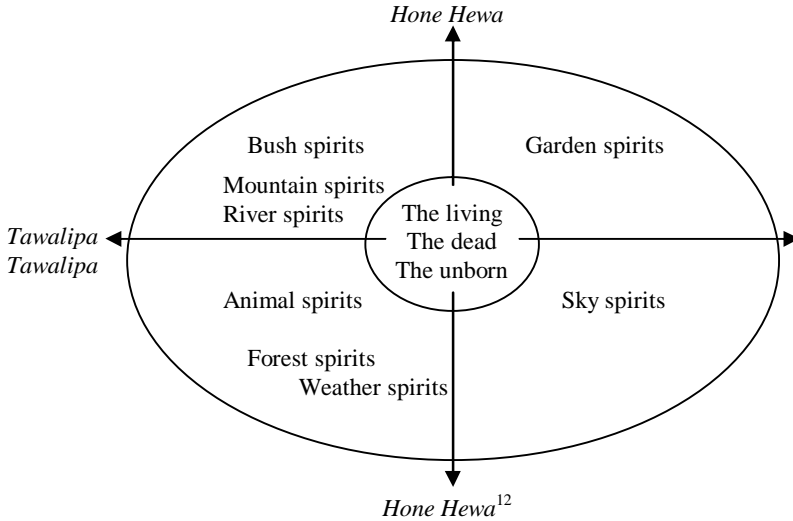


Figure 1. Yuna belief in *Hone Hewa* going beyond animistic beliefs, totems, and spirits

The Yuna believed the Supreme Spirit, *Hone Hewa Tawalipa*, as someone above the other spirits, such as spirits of rivers, spirits of the bush, spirits of the grassland, spirits of the mountains, and spirits of ancestors. According to the Yuna way of thinking, they could not relate to the Supreme Spirit, even though they believed in His existence, and His ability to know all, see all, and hear all, and punish those who did wrong.

EVIDENCES OF YUNA YEARNING FOR MEANINGFUL WORSHIP AND INTIMACY

This section deals with evidences of the Yuna people's yearning for intimacy and true worship. "Culture consists of two levels – the surface behaviour level, and the deep, worldview level. At the core of culture, and, therefore, at the very heart of all human life, lies the structuring of the basic assumptions, values, and allegiances we call worldview."¹³ Yuna people

¹² Neville Bartle, "Death, Witchcraft, and the Spirit World in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea", in *Point* 29 (2005), pp. 24-25.

¹³ Sydney Gould, "Vernacular Bible Reading in a Traditionally Oral Society", Ph.D. diss., St Lucia Qld: University of Queensland, 2005, p. 91.

are no exception to this statement. They, too, had behaviour and patterns of life that required explanation. Elderly Yuna men and women would agree that they all dreamed of being closer to *Hone Hewa Tawalipa*, but such longings remained only as myths and wishful thoughts. Many, however, acknowledged and honoured Him, but lacked intimacy and assurance.¹⁴ Three examples of such yearnings are below.

Firstly, certain men, at pig-killing ceremonies, would kill the largest male pig, and then get unmarried men, who had never experienced sexual union with a woman, to toss the dead pig into the air, saying, “This is your pig for blessing us, and giving us sweet potatoes to raise these pigs.” The name addressed, while tossing it, was “the Sun, *Hone Hewa*”. The meat of this pig was to be eaten only by unmarried men.¹⁵

Secondly, as seen by the upward direction, in which the dead pig was thrown, Yuna believed that *Hone Hewa Tawalipa* existed up there in the sky, and was also known as the Father.¹⁶ In the same way, the God of the Bible is our Father.¹⁷ He is on His throne, in heaven, beyond the sky.¹⁸ Why is the concept of this Supreme Spirit up in the sky significant? The reason is that every spirit the Yuna worshipped, feared, and served, was believed to dwell down here on earth, like the spirits of the river (*ipa tiri*), of the sacred pools (*yu ane*), the sacred stones (*awi*), of ancestors (*kene*

¹⁴ Gershon Pokono, “Missionary Endeavour Towards the Tribal People of Hela Huli and its Challenges for Missions”, B.Th. thesis, Banz PNG: CLTC, October 2007, p. 3.

¹⁵ Chief Karibe Batane. Interview by author in *tok ples*, Sigri, April 6, 2009.

¹⁶ Sangi Ambuabe, Abe clan chief. Interview by author in *tok ples*, Kuyebi, April 4, 2010.

¹⁷ Pangu Paliago, pastor CBCPNG. Interview by author in *tok ples*, Wewak, January 10, 2010. Pangu was a pioneer Yuna graduate of CLTC in 1969, and now serves as Principal of CBC Highlands Regional Tok Pisin Bible School at Kelabo. He states that he found out, after further study and ministry experience, that the Supreme Spirit of the Yuna was, in fact, the God of the Bible, but could not make the name change, because of the two different names used, especially, *hewa*, “sun”, which today’s people could mistake for the real sun.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* On the other hand, the earth, in the Yuna mind, was Mother, from where everyone gets their food.

rinigo), and many more. But who, then, was this Spirit up there, and why would Yuna people acknowledge Him at all, if He were not real?

Thirdly, for centuries, Yuna yearned to fight the *rama* evil spirits, and defeat them. A common saying by those who have lost loved ones was, “If only these (*rama*) evil spirits had bodies, like humans, I would declare war against their line, and tell my son to carry on the fight after I die, until they are defeated forever.”¹⁹ Though not stated, death was credited to the *rama* evil spirits, and not the Supreme Spirit, *Hone Hewa Tawalipa*. Truths that are seen in this action, and need mentioning, are:

- the Yuna people’s belief that the *rama* evil spirits were not omnipotent;
- that they could be defeated;
- that the *rama* evil spirits were not omniscient;
- that Yuna people can still dream of ways to defeat them, and be free from their powers.

Out of this heart-cry of primitive Yuna are several questions that demand answers. Why would those who had never been exposed to any other power greater than the evil spirits *rama*, dream of possible victory, unless, and unknown to them, knowledge of a Superior Being had already been implanted in them? Who could the source of this great Power be? Was there a voice telling them there is someone, who is able, and willing, to defend them, help them, and save them? Why would men and boys, who fought in tribal warfare, say, “I would tell my son to continue the fight”? The Son of the Supreme Spirit completed the work on the day of God’s choosing. Furthermore, yearning for victory over unseen, powerful spirits, sounds strange. However, such thoughts and words were never in vain, in that attaining the knowledge to make the connection between the “Supreme Spirit”, and the power available in Him to defeat the evil spirits, was just a matter of time. This leads us to another important question.

¹⁹ Kuruku Paraye, Wanga clan chief. Interview by author in *tok ples*, Sigri, March 10, 2010.

When gods and spirits are believed to see all, sense all, hear all, and punish all, how can a person ever dream about escaping unseen? On one hand, people are supposed to be totally committed to their gods, in worship and in service, but yet, the Yuna, though offering sacrifices to the evil spirits, in their times of grief and sorrow, dared to think and yearn, “If only there was a way, or a greater power, that would deal with these evil spirits.”²⁰ The dream was that there had to be someone, or some way out there, to help the primitive people. Telford says, “There was clear evidence that Yuna people were sacrificing to the *rama* evil spirits, only to appease them, and out of fear, not with respect, and in worship.”²¹ No specific sacrifice was offered to *Hone Hewa Tawalipa* on a daily, monthly, or yearly basis. By the same token, there was no set requirement to attract His favour through sacrifices, though His name was used. However, he was honoured and revered as One who is there.

Finally, the Yuna yearned to look after pigs, to feed themselves and their children. But every pig the Yuna raised was killed, and the meat and blood given to appease the *rama* evil spirits. What was left for the Yuna man and his family was just skin, fingers, and bones. Whenever a large pig was sighted in the family home, Yuna men knew that the same old enemy, the *rama* evil spirits, would inflict someone with an illness, so the pig would be slaughtered for sacrifice. Unfortunately, such dreadful events would actually happen, resulting in every single bit of the pork meat being given to the *rama* evil spirit, with nothing left for the pig owner to take home to his family. The worst thing about this, for the Yuna, was that they knew it was *rama* evil spirits tricking them. Again, the yearning of the Yuna was, “When will I ever be able to multiply my pigs, and have the meat to myself,

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Brian Telford. Interview by author through skype, CLTC, March 2010. Brian and his wife, Helen, from New Zealand, settled among the Yuna people in Arou as missionaries in 1969, only five years after the Yuna opened up to the outside world. He and Ian Armitage, another New Zealander, who had settled with his wife, Aileen, and children, upriver at Kelabo, among the Yuna, made the first contact with *Kalai* people to the west at the wishes and guidance of the Yuna people. These two men were the first white men, also known as *Bogaye*, to be sighted by the *Kalai* people.

and to my family?”²² Why would primitive Yuna yearn for such a possibility if there was no such power available out there? The coming of the first missionary family to settle at the Arou Mission Station arrived only three years after the area had been opened up to the outside world. The coming of the first missionary family to settle at Arou was celebrated with one of the biggest pig-killing feasts. The relief and joy of enjoying pork meat for themselves was, in fact, celebrated in style, and with great expression of emotion on that memorable day.²³ The Yuna, today, are still known for killing pigs and distributing meat to friends and family at religious gatherings. In this action, the Yuna are saying “thank you” to God, and showing the devil his powerlessness.

EVIDENCES OF YUNA RESPONSE TO THE REVELATION OF THE SUPREME SPIRIT

This section will discuss the Yuna people’s response to the revelation of the Supreme Spirit. Mantovani recalls an interesting tale:

A common story tells of a painting in a church in the Pacific depicting the arrival of first missionaries, the strange thing about this picture was that, on the shore, among the crowd awaiting their arrival, is Christ Himself. The message, then, is clear, that the role of missionaries is to point to the One, who is already present, without having being recognised.²⁴

When missionaries brought the gospel to the land of the Yuna, the people put up little resistance to the gospel message, and the missionaries who brought it. Only a small percentage tried to resist, otherwise every one of the first-generation Yuna people responded to the gospel positively.²⁵ In

²² Chief Karibe Batane. Interview by author in *tok ples*, Sigri, April 6, 2009.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ennio Mantovani, *Divine Revelation and the Religions in PNG* (Goroka PNG: Melanesian Institute, 2000), p. v.

²⁵ Ian Armitage, “Missionary Report: April, 1965” (Banz PNG: CLTC vertical files). Ian Armitage, and his wife, Aileen, have reported that young men, who were warriors, came to the mission voluntarily in a matter of days after their arrival from West Sepik, asking that missionaries come to their village to tell their people about Jesus.

one of his earliest reports, Armitage states, “In just 12 months, there has been a great movement, as groups of people have forsaken the sacrificing of pigs to appease and supplicate the spirits.” “They have left behind cultural marriage customs, which clash with the Word of God, and, in short, made revolutionary changes in their way of life.”²⁶ Another missionary to Yuna people in the Pori Valley, to the southeast, reports, around the same time, “It would appear that there is very little flock in the valley, who have not professed faith in Christ. Almost all (apart from these) have been instructed or counselled in small groups or family units. There has been widespread forsaking of spirit practices.”²⁷

What could have caused such a change of loyalty in a primitive tribe in a matter of just weeks or months of having been introduced to the white man, and the gospel message he brought? To reach the Yuna with the gospel, a power encounter was not necessary. Because their positive response to the gospel proves that they had been waiting to be free of killing pigs for the *rama* evil spirits. However, we will now consider evidences of similar beliefs in a Supreme Spirit in Papua New Guinea, and a yearning to know Him more, as the Yuna people did.

EXAMPLES OF A BELIEF IN A SUPREME SPIRIT IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

This section will demonstrate to the reader that Yuna people were not isolated in their belief in a Supreme Spirit. Many tribes in Papua New Guinea, and in Melanesia, believed in a Supreme Spirit, as did the Yuna. The Kalai people are neighbours of the Yuna, and live towards the west, bordering Southern Highlands Province and Western Province. They believed in a Supreme Spirit, whom they called *Dikima* in their own dialect. “He was believed to be creator, and all-powerful, who could even turn the mighty Strickland River around.”²⁸ *Dikima* was believed to be eternal,

²⁶ Glenda Giles, linguist, educator, and missionary. Interview with author, Wewak, January 13, 2010. Yuna people always thought murder and stealing were wrong, however, polygamy was permissible.

²⁷ Bob Dobbie, “Missionary Report: April, 1965” (Banz PNG: CLTC vertical files). Bob Dobbie and his wife were also from New Zealand, and served as missionaries among the Yuna people, in the Pori Valley.

²⁸ Sande Behelia, CBC pastor. Interview by author in *tok ples*, Kelabo, April 7, 2010.

unchangeable, holy, and without blame. The Spirit was omnipotent, to the point of knowing and seeing things done in secret (such as stealing, lying, and adultery), thus being able to reveal wrongs, and punish evildoers accordingly.²⁹ He was also believed to travel long distances with his whole house, thus showing that He was all-sufficient, needing nothing. He never stayed in houses built by other people. He was also believed to be Light and glorious, thus needing no light.³⁰ The moon was owned by *Dikima*, who originally kept it here on earth, but later it had escaped to the sky. Ancestors tried building a tall tree house to bring it back to earth, but did not succeed.³¹

The Kalai believed *Dikima* was married, and had a son by His wife. However, the son and wife were warned against urinating in certain places around the area where they lived, especially when *Dikima* was not at home. The story continues that they disobeyed these words, and a flood started, which became a lake, covering the whole area. The mother and son climbed up the tallest tree, but the floodwaters kept rising up to them. The mother decided to throw her only son into the water, but still the water kept rising. The husband saw what was happening, and shot an arrow, aiming at her heart. Hitting its target, the arrow took her heart to a mountaintop, with the result that the lake dried up.³² Though very close to the biblical account of the great flood, and Christ's sacrificial death on the cross to save sinners' souls, there are differences. In the Kalai story, a woman is involved, and the son dies in the floodwaters, and does not rise again.

The Wapisumi people of Kagua, in Southern Highlands Province, believed that "the Father up in the sky was named *Yakali*". He was revered as one who was above all other spirits, was over all creation, and was the Father

²⁹ David Bitaka, CBC pastor. Interview by author in *tok ples*, Kelabo, April 7, 2010.

³⁰ Daniel Gogole, CBC pastor. Interview by author in *tok ples*, Kelabo, April 7, 2010.

³¹ Ben Homabu, CBC pastor. Interview by author in *tok ples*, Kelabo, April 7, 2010. Could this be their version of the Tower of Babel?

³² Jacob Wanta, CBC pastor. Interview by author in *tok ples* by questionnaire, Kelabo, April 7, 2010. Could this be their version of Adam's disobedience, the great flood in Gen 6, and the redemption stories?

of all human beings. It was believed that all blessings flowed from Him, especially when people offered Him white pigs.³³

The Kobon people, living on the border of the Western Highlands and Madang Provinces, believed in, and revered, a Supreme Being, whom they called *Rumualye*. *Rumu* means “thunder”, and *alye* means “calls”; literally “he who speaks with thunder”.³⁴ Thunder was identified as his voice, and a warning against the possible approach of enemies. *Rumualye* was called upon in times of enemy tribal attacks, when someone in the family was sick, or when people wanted to settle grievances. He was called upon to help care for pigs.³⁵ Before a pig was killed, a water basin was put near it, and someone would thank *Rumualye* for making the pig grow big, and pray that He would do the same for other pigs in future. The people also had laws for initiation (similar to the Ten Commandments). The whole tribe believed the initiation laws to be from the Supreme Being *Rumualye*.³⁶

Before missionaries brought the gospel, the Mape people of Finschhafen, in Morobe Province, believed in a Supreme Spirit, a male called *Pangu*, who existed in the skies. He was believed to be eternal, and creator of all things seen and unseen. Lightning and thunder were believed to be caused by *Pangu*.³⁷

The Gogodala people of Western Province believed a Supreme Spirit called *Aida*. He was believed to be the father of all kinds of good spirits, evil spirits, and of human beings. *Aida* was a male spirit, believed to be equally powerful over both the seen and the unseen. This spirit was invisible, but was able to be manifested in chiefs and hunters by giving them success in war hunting.³⁸ Success in any field was credited to *Aida*. He was believed to punish people through different misfortunes if chiefs did not give him his due share of the meat from hunting, or when women trespassed into areas

³³ Bartle, “Death, Witchcraft, and the Spirit World”, pp. 135-137.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Max Martin, CLTC student. Interview by author, CLTC, March 2009.

³⁸ Buga’abo KUPIYE, CLTC student. Interview by author, CLTC, July 2009.

where he was believed to be living.³⁹ However, this spirit expected, and received, a share of food and produce from gardens, a share of animal meat, and he sometimes took on human form, and visited chiefs, or was seen by ordinary people. When this occurred, the person would become confused in his or her mind, and quickly become ill.

However, the Yuna Supreme Spirit was present, but could not be seen, and did not require a share of the hunting, gardening, or fighting spoils. The Aifhon tribal people of West New Britain Province believed in a Supreme Spirit, called *Egumin*, meaning “unseen supreme spirit, above all powers and spirits”. He was without a beginning. His name is described with a phrase *egumin mopol*, meaning “the blooming flowers”. This name describes beauty, brightness, and glory. He did not have any personal contact with people, but His presence could be felt by certain individuals, at certain places. He was believed to be a good spirit, and nothing bad was caused by him. Instead, all misfortune came from evil spirits,⁴⁰ thus contradicting *Hone Hewa Tawalipa* of the Yuna, who punished evil done in secret, or in public, through sickness, death, or pain. But, on the positive side, the *egumin*, like the Yuna *Hone Hewa Tawalipa*, was the source of all good things, and His presence could be sensed, just as the Yuna believed about the presence of their Supreme Spirit.

The Kupurup clan and people of Mendi, in Southern Highlands Province, believed and worshipped a Supreme Spirit called the *Sakil-Aol*, meaning “Man of Mercy”, who was believed to be watching over people in kind ways, with good intentions. On the other hand, “Mercy Man” would also kill those who did wrong.⁴¹ The principal spirit, worshipped by the Dinga people of Chimbu, was named *Yanigelwa*. He was known as an all-powerful source of strength to win wars, all-knowing of things done in secret, and was everywhere at all times. He was eternal, and creator of earth and the sky, and was protector of everyone from all kinds of evil,

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Samson Kieng, CLTC student from Kimbe. Interview by author, CLTC, July 2009.

⁴¹ Mark Kas, student from Mendi. Interview by author, CLTC, July 2009.

though there was no evidence of personal contact, by the way of offering sacrifices, or through prayers.⁴²

EXAMPLES FROM MELANESIA AND FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Don Richardson, in his book, *Peace Child*, recalls a certain experience among the Dani tribe. “The new missionary had grasped just two words of the local language: *ki* meaning “life”, and *wone* meaning “words”. In his first formal speech, the missionary announced that he had come to them with the *ki wone*, to which the younger generation did not pay much attention, but the older folk were awe-struck. Why? Their ancestors foretold that a white-skinned person would bring the *ki wone* or “words of life”. It was also foretold that such an event would signal the return of immortality to mankind. It was predicted that the white-skinned knew the secret to eternal life, and, if the people believed these words, it would result in immortality passing on to them. That same night, while the missionary was doing other things, the whole valley burst forth into singing. Next morning, thousands surrounded the missionary’s house, asking, “How should we welcome the words of life, the *ki wone*?”⁴³ However, Yuna people had been told by their ancestors that when men with white feet were sighted in their land everyone must prepare to die, because their coming was a sign of the end of the world.⁴⁴

The Birao people of Guadalcanal, in the Solomon Islands, believed in supreme spirits called *Garehoba* and *Chacha*. People feared these spirits, because they believed that the spirits could kill if the people did unpleasant things towards the spirits, or to others in the community (such as murder, stealing, adultery, or incest). However, no sacrifice was expected by the spirits, except that, because they were male spirits, they called upon men to

⁴² Francis Poye, “A Biblical Critique of the Worship of the Sun God ‘Yanigelwa’ by the Dinga People of Papua New Guinea”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 20-1 (2004), pp. 84-86.

⁴³ Don Richardson, *Peace Child* (Ventura CA: Regal Books, 2005), pp. 243-244.

⁴⁴ Hani, pioneer CBC pastor at Pori. Interview by author in *tok ples*, Mt Hagen, June 2010. Evidences of this included men crying and weeping in public, the killing of pigs in large numbers, the sharing of meat with family and friends, and yelling and shouting.

help in wars against enemies.⁴⁵ People, however, offered sacrifices to their own gods and spirits.⁴⁶

Scholars, who claimed that human history exhibits an evolution in religion from tribal gods to monotheism, have largely been refuted, because of the findings of Wilhelm Schmidt, as expressed in his book, *Origin and Growth of Religion*. In every culture he examined, he found a belief about a supreme god. This god has characteristics, which are remarkably uniform across different cultures. This god “lives in the sky, above, is thought of as male, and a Father, the Creator”.⁴⁷ He has no physical representation, is an eternal, all knowing, all-good, all-powerful lawgiver, who hates evil. He is a judge, and humans have been alienated from him, due to some past misdemeanour.

Why do people all over the world, even primitive tribes, have similar conceptions of such a God if no one like Him existed? Thus, the widespread belief in the “Sky-God” agrees with what we read in the Bible⁴⁸. Africans believe that such a God exists, and He is not altogether neglected in worship and prayer.⁴⁹ In any event, it is a striking fact that many primitive cultures have a belief in some sort of High God, even though there often is no specific ritual directed towards such a Being.⁵⁰ The most popular prayer in the world is addressed to “Our Father, who art in heaven” in Matt 6:9, as in the words of our Lord Jesus, when teaching His disciples to talk with Him intimately in prayer. It is possible that the earliest prayers around the world were addressed in similar words. As Mantovani put it, “Names given to the Supreme Being seem to symbolise two experiences: the otherness of the Supreme Being – He is up there, different from humans – and His care for the people, portrayed by the father image. He is

⁴⁵ Nicholas Ruhia, CLTC student. Interview by author, CLTC, March, 2009.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ballard, *Similarities in Primitive Beliefs in an All-Powerful God*. Available at <http://www.peterballard.org/index.html>. Accessed on April 22, 2009.

⁴⁸ Ninian Smart, *Religious Experience of Mankind* (New York NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1969), pp. 53-55.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ballard, *Similarities in Primitive Beliefs in an All-Powerful God*.

experienced as the caring one, the one who provides food, shelter, and warmth.”⁵¹ Examples of a belief in a Supreme Spirit all over world, at different times in history.

Ancient Biblical Times

“Altar to an unknown god”: these words were already inscribed on stones at Mars Hill in Athens. The apostle Paul read it and made the proclamation that “the god, whom you have worshipped for so long as ‘unknown’, I am going to proclaim to you” (Acts 17:22-23). Was the God, Paul was about to proclaim, really a foreign god to these philosophers? No, the God of the Hebrews that Paul was about to proclaim was anticipated in their culture. F. F. Bruce, commenting on the altar to an unknown god, said, “Even the shrine in Jerusalem, erected for the worship of the God of Israel, could not contain Him, how much less the splendid shrines of the Athenian Acropolis, dedicated, as they were, to gods, that were no gods.”⁵² True, even pagans realised that no material house could contain His divine nature. These were words from a Greek literary classic, “what house, built by craftsmen, could enclose the form of divine within enfolding walls”.⁵³ Ps 50:9-12 confirms these words by stating that God has no need, nor is short of anything, because all things are His creation, therefore, they belong to Him. In light of these words and evidences, we could ask why there was belief in such a god, even by pagans, and why make such comments, if there was no one like Him out there.

Primitive South American Tribal People

The king of the Incas, known for building a city in the mountains of Peru, and a temple (compared to the temple of Solomon) to the sun god, became frustrated when he realised that even a simple cloud could block the mighty sun, whom he and his people had believed and worshipped as a supreme

⁵¹ Ennio Mantovani, ed., “An Introduction to Melanesian Religions”, in *Point* 6 (1984), p. 55.

⁵² F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts* (London UK: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1962), p. 357.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 375. Bruce quotes an earlier Greek literary classic by Euripides, *Fragments*, p. 968.

god for centuries. Therefore, this monarch asked the important question, “If *Inti*, the sun is not god, who then is?”⁵⁴ The monarch put three important statements forward about the sun god: *Inti* cannot be universal if, while giving light to some, he withholds it from others, he cannot be perfect if he can never remain at ease, and he cannot be all-powerful, when even the smallest cloud may cover him.⁵⁵

Why would this ancient monarch ask such questions if there were no such powerful person or persons in the universe, or beyond it? Why yearn for something or someone who is not really there after all? Who was responsible for putting the ability to yearn for such a God in human hearts, whether it is the Yuna people, the king of the Incas, or Greeks in Athens?

The People of East Asia, India

Two foreign missionaries, a Dane and a Norwegian, working among the Santal people of India, near Calcutta, have this to report: after the Norwegian had learned the local language, he started proclaiming the gospel to the local people. To his amazement, the locals made it very clear that they already knew about this person. They even had a local name for the God of the Bible, *Thakur Jiu*,⁵⁶ meaning, *Thakur*, “genuine”, and *Jiu*, “God”. These people had stories going back to the story of the great flood, and that of the fall, which were very similar to those of the Bible. The name of the first man created by the *Thakur Jiu* was called *Haram*, according to their myths. “A being called *Lita* tempted *Haram* (the first man) and his wife to drink rice beer, pour part of it on the ground as an offering to Satan, only to wake up and find out about their own nakedness.”⁵⁷

The People of East Asia, Burma

The Kui tribesmen, living along the Thai-Burma border, actually built houses of worship dedicated to the true God, in anticipation of the time

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 33. The king of the Incas began to realise that he had been worshipping a mere thing as creator. Bravely, he advanced to the next inevitable question: “If *Inti* is not the true God, *who then is?*”

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

when a messenger from God would enter such places of worship with the lost books in his hand to teach the people. “No idols were ever placed in such places of worship, but Kui folk would gather, and, in dim, uncertain fashion, worship the great God above.”⁵⁸

The People of Nigeria, Africa

Like many other tribes and people groups on earth, the Igbo people of Nigeria were animistic, and believed in different deities. These deities included ancestral spirits, protective spirits, and household spirits.⁵⁹ Despite these animistic concepts, the Igbo religious worldview has a belief in a “High God”, who was called *Chukwu*. Was this a concept, adopted after the introduction of Christianity, or was it part of their belief for centuries past? Evidence has shown that the concept of a “High God” was not introduced to them after Christianity arrived, rather it was shown to be interwoven in traditional Igbo cosmology. Thus *Chukwu*, the High God, occupied a central place in the Igbo worldview, before the advent of Christianity, and continues to do so to this day.⁶⁰ Sacrifices offered to *Chukwu* were described as “sacrifices of joy”, and involved a pure white fowl, or other bird, offered up alive on a long pole. This bird is left to die and rot. Alternatively, a sacrifice may be a pure white egg, which parallels the Old Testament concept of purity.⁶¹ However, these people do not feel obligated to offer sacrifices to *Chukwu*, because they believe He did not need to be appeased, therefore, they had no urgency to appeal to His favour.⁶²

There are so many examples that could be discussed. However, the main issue here is why there is this uniform belief in the human mind? Why is

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 38. This is very close to the story of the fall of Adam and his wife Eve in the Garden of Eden.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁵⁹ Mike Bews, “The Concept of the ‘High God’ in Traditional Igbo Religion”, in *International Journal of Frontier Missions* (1985), pp. 315-320.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

mankind universally cognisant of a greater, higher spirit? Why is humankind not satisfied with the gods or spirits they worship? Why yearn for some higher person or power if there is no one out there? And so this discussion must conclude by commenting, just like looking for light in the darkness, even without having any knowledge of light, there has to be Someone Higher, or Greater, than all the gods and spirits people worshipped.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT GOD, THE SUPREME SPIRIT

Gen 1:1 is the evidence we have to the question of the existence of God, the Supreme Spirit. The author of Genesis breaks into the silence with the words “in the beginning, God”. Because the Bible is authored by Hebrews, this God is “the God of the Hebrews, the Supreme Spirit, *Elohim*. The name *Elohim* carries the meaning, “God of the Hebrews”,⁶³ while the general term for *god* is *el*, or *elohim*.⁶⁴ The name of God here also carries the idea of “Almighty God” or “the strong God”, and what less than almighty strength could bring all things out of nothing?⁶⁵ There is no argument, whatsoever, about the existence and the reality of this God in scripture. Instead, His existence is simply assumed and accepted.

ADAM AND HIS ENCOUNTER WITH GOD THE SUPREME SPIRIT

Adam was the first human being to come into contact with the Supreme Being. Adam was the climax of all creation (Gen 1:26-27; 2:7-8; 2:15). The Creator took the created man and placed him in the garden, commanding him to look after it. The created man knew His Creator, and vice versa. On the same note, the man was told, and he understood, what he was created for. He also understood the command given by God not to eat of the forbidden fruit. Both Creator and creature knew each other intimately. The relationship, shared by God and man, was damaged when

⁶³ Jacob Neusner, and William S. Green, eds, *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* (New York NY: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), p. 256.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Scottsdale PA: Herald Press, 1708), p. 3.

man disobeyed God, and ate the forbidden fruit.⁶⁶ It affected both the man and his Creator, as can be seen in the way the Creator came searching for the man. After the man had eaten the fruit, God called to him, “Where are you?” (Gen 3:9), thus showing us something about God, and His plans for mankind. It shows us His heart cry against the betrayal of His desire to have intimacy and fellowship with mankind forever.

ABRAHAM THE FATHER OF A NATION, AND HIS ENCOUNTER WITH THE SUPREME SPIRIT

The customs of Abraham’s time, as recorded in Genesis, have been confirmed by recent archaeological findings. Furthermore, it is believed that Abraham’s movement from Ur to Haran, where he settled, was just before Ur was destroyed by invading Elamites.⁶⁷ Abraham had nowhere to go, and was stuck in Ur during the immanent invasion of the said enemies, when he heard the voice of God. Without reasoning, Abraham hears that voice and obeys it (Gen 12:1). He acted as directed, and settled in an unknown place, thus showing his faith in the Supreme Being and His promises. But the most important question is: did Abraham know God before this call? The answer to this question is negative, as confirmed in Josh 24:14-15, which says that, before his encounter with the Supreme Spirit, Abraham worshipped and served foreign gods, just like everyone else in his day. However, the Supreme Spirit graciously elected Abraham, as he, in his situation, responded with faith. Abraham, therefore, left his country, his family, and his people for an unknown land. Is this madness, or was it that this human being had an encounter with “the Supreme Being”, which he could not resist? The Bible confirms to us that it happened as a result of a confrontation and command from God. This is

⁶⁶ Ballard, *Similarities in Primitive Beliefs in an All-Powerful God*. Available at <http://www.peterballard.org/index.html>. “Some misdeed of the past, as believed and told over and over again by primitive tribes, according to anthropologist and the author, as per above.” On the same note, the Hela Yuna also had a yearning in their minds to be free from death, and the fear of death. They also yearned for the day to fight against death and defeat it.

⁶⁷ Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (London UK: William Collins, 1969), p. 338.

another evidence of the Supreme Spirit longing to have intimacy with man, thus revealing Himself in this way.

MOSES AND HIS ENCOUNTER WITH THE SUPREME SPIRIT

Moses' first encounter with the Supreme Spirit takes place on a mountaintop in the land of Midian (Ex 3:2ff). At the site, Moses understands, without hesitation, that this is a visitation from the Supreme Being. The Supreme Spirit declares Himself as the God of the patriarchs, the father of the nation of Israel, whose people were, at that moment, groaning under slavery in Egypt. There are trademarks in the way the Supreme Being visits men, like in Gen 3:8-9, when while Adam was hiding in sin and guilt; Noah, while looking for answers against all the evil in the world (Gen 6:1); Abraham, while stuck with his family, with nowhere to go (Gen 12:1).⁶⁸ Here are examples of humans stuck in situations, with no way of escape, when the Supreme Spirit steps in with grace, and offers help and salvation. The message is a trademark that, no matter what you do, or what you experience, God says "I care, and I will act."

In the case of Moses, God steps in and offers help. Moses' response proves that he knew who was speaking, by obediently taking off his sandals. However, Moses shows his humanity, in protesting and refusing to represent the LORD before the king of Egypt and the people of Israel. But Moses accepted the challenge and agreed to go. Only an encounter with something supernatural can make a fearful, timid, and runaway human like Moses change his mind, go, and confront the Pharaoh, son of the same man who had given orders for Moses to be killed for murdering an Egyptian officer (Ex 2:15).

JESUS CHRIST THE REPLICA OF THE SUPREME SPIRIT

Of all people, and all the different ways God the Supreme Spirit used to reveal Himself to mankind, as shown in the Bible, the Lord Jesus is the greatest and the highest of His revelations. Jesus Christ was not one of the many ways, or people, God used; rather He was God in Person. This is confirmed in both the Old and New Testaments. In Jesus Christ, we see the

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Supreme Spirit in human form. In Jesus Christ, we see the fullness of God's original plan for mankind; that the Creator, the Supreme Spirit, wants to have an intimate relationship with them. God became man, through the incarnate Christ, whose name is *Immanuel* (Matt 1:21).⁶⁹ In Christ, we see perfection, the kind that God planned for when He first created man. In Him, all the laws, perfection, and standards of God are fulfilled. He is without deceit (1 John 2:27); He is True (Rom 3:4); He is holy (1 Peter 1:16). This is the same person John introduced in 1 John 1:1-2 as "alive before the world began . . . was seen . . . touched . . . and listened to Him in person. . . . He was eternal, and always with God the Father."

PAUL, THE PHARISEE, AND HIS ENCOUNTER WITH THE SUPREME SPIRIT

Paul was born in Tarsus, which gave him the opportunity, as a university city, to be exposed to the most advanced learning of his day.⁷⁰ Like his father, Paul possessed Roman citizenship, a high privilege, and was well versed in Hellenistic culture and thought.⁷¹ When first seen, in the days of the disciples, Saul, later Paul, was an enemy of the church. Later, Paul became a believer, missionary, prisoner, and, eventually, a martyr for Jesus Christ. The life of this person, and his radical change from being an enemy of the church to dying for its cause, deserves an explanation.

For those who read, and believe, the words of Acts 8:1, the story of Paul's experience on the Damascus Road is the only explanation. This man was on his way to arrest and imprison Christians, with written orders from the authorities in Jerusalem. In his thinking, Paul was doing a very big favour

⁶⁹ Were the yearnings of the Yuna in vain? The author believes they were not, because this is evidence that the Creator of Yuna, and all people, also had such a yearning to have that original intimacy restored. His Son is introduced to the Yuna as "God With Us", the *Hone Hewa Tawalipa*. He is with them in human form.

⁷⁰ Josh McDowell, *More Than a Carpenter* (Wheaton IL: Tyndale House, 1971), p. 79. Paul was raised and trained in Tarsus, a university city, respected for its Stoic philosophers and culture. Strabo, the Greek geographer, recognised Tarsus for being interested in education and philosophy.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

for the government, for the Jewish people, their religion, and, eventually, their God. Paul was a Pharisee, and he was out to destroy any group that opposed established Hebrew institutions. The Lord Jesus was a threat, and they had had to deal with Him earlier. His disciples had been a great annoyance, even after Peter was imprisoned. James was put to the sword by Herod, and Stephen was stoned to death, while Saul kept watch over the clothes of those who brought about his demise (Acts 8:1; 12:1). Paul later confessed that it was Jesus Christ, the risen Lord, who changed him (1 Cor 9:1; 15:8), and was whom he believed would raise him from death. Paul, from being a hater of Christians and Gentiles, later became a believer himself, and an apostle to the Gentiles (Eph 3:1). What other explanation can we offer for such a situation, except that it was the same experience that Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses had had, which changed their lives? Paul also confessed that he had met the Lord Jesus in person, who appointed him as an apostle (Acts 22:9). A personal encounter with the Supreme Spirit, the *Hone Hewa Tawalipa*, changed this man forever.

RECOMMENDATIONS

THE YUNA PEOPLE MUST NOT SEPARATE THEMSELVES FROM THE PAST

This section will be done by SWOT analysis.⁷² It will talk about the strengths within Yuna culture that can help young people today to change their mindset relating to the issue being discussed. It will also help those who must tell this generation about the need to know *Hone Hewa Tawalipa*; a stocktake of resources that are available to them to help them get the job done. It will also talk about the opportunities, and the threats, that the environment today presents to those who are given responsibilities to tell young people, and, particularly, the young people themselves.

Pigono, in Yuna, means “stories of the past”, and *malu* means “my story”, which includes genealogies, land rights, family status, tribal laws, and personal identity. Both these words go together, as far as the Yuna people and their land are concerned. The purpose of this article was to

⁷² SWOT is a strategic planning method, which evaluates: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, which are involved in project or business ventures.

demonstrate to the Yuna of this generation that the God of the Bible is none other than the *Hone Hewa Tawalipa* of their fathers. In endeavouring to do so, this article has examined how Yuna people, in the past, related to the Supreme Spirit, with the limited amount of knowledge they had of him. The article has also compared similar beliefs in Papua New Guinea, and the different versions and evidence of such a belief from among our Pacific Island neighbours, and, finally, the beliefs of other peoples around the world. We have also looked at examples of individuals in the Bible, who lived at different times, yet, when the Supreme Spirit touched their lives, these different characters changed, and did things they would not, or could not, normally do. The first-generation Yuna responded very differently, when they heard that God was the Supreme Spirit they had vividly known over generations past. They, like the Huli Koroba, left the ways of the spirits, and followed Jesus, never to go back again to their old ways of worship.⁷³ However, unlike their brothers, the Huli Koroba, the Yuna people do not have any stories of power encounters, which could have triggered a stampede of turning away from their old ways to believing the gospel message brought by missionaries.

Instead, there were evidences of a readiness and a willingness to leave behind the ways of the *rama* evil spirits and follow the new way, because this was the message they had been yearning to hear for centuries. “Darkness, fear, and hopelessness were replaced by light, hope, and faith in the One, with whom they were denied personal relationship and intimacy for centuries, as with their brothers, the Hela Huli people.”⁷⁴ This is an issue, of which Yuna people today can be proud, because of the way their fathers readily responded to the gospel and the revelation of the Supreme Spirit, *Hone Hewa Tawalipa*.

⁷³ Ossie Fountain, “The Religious Experience of the Koroba Huli”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 2-2 (1985), pp. 192-193. There was a power encounter with one of the village leaders, who earlier told the missionary that he did not want to follow the Jesus of the white man. He would rather stick with the spirits, but, when his child became ill and nearly died, he asked the missionary to pray to Jesus. The missionary prayed, and the child was healed, and, eventually, the village leader became one of the first church leaders.

⁷⁴ Pokono, “Hela Missionary Endeavour”, p. 3.

IDENTIFY THE NEED TO REVISIT THE DREAMS OF THEIR FOREFATHERS

However, that response was not an issue of pride. Rather, it was a day when Yuna people realised a dream. The dream was not only of their own, but the dreams of their fathers, and others before them, for centuries. As we have already discussed, theirs was a dream to live and be free, without fear. Therefore, Yuna people, today, must identify their serious need to revisit the dreams of their forefathers. They must understand their own cultural identity and heritage, and decide the future for themselves, and for their children, with *Hone Hewa Tawalipa*, who has been revealed to them already. The Bible, which is the revealed and inspired Word of *Hone Hewa Tawalipa*, must be made the textbook to reach Yuna young people today. Because nearly everyone in Yuna has seen signs, and has heard stories of how their fathers yearned to be free from the *rama* evil spirits, to stop sacrificing pigs to them, even though they still lost loved ones in death, after offering every single family pig in their possession. Cutting fingers, and shaving hair and beards, were signs of pain, deep sorrow, and distress. This is why we say signs were written on the bodies, hearts, and faces of the first generation of Yuna people, who heard the gospel and accepted it. The Yuna attitude towards the timing and arrival of the missionaries, and the acceptance of the gospel, was well summarised by one question, asked by the Yuna people. “How long have you known this Jesus? And why did you not bring the good news about Jesus to us earlier?”⁷⁵ It was a dream-come-true for the Yuna, when they heard the gospel and believed it. They and their fathers had been dreaming and waiting for the day they would hear about a way to be free from the *rama* evil spirits, and their control over their lives. Today’s educated Yuna people, who have been fed by the evolutionists, with their theory of the universe, must be made to go back to the revealed Word of *Hone Hewa Tawalipa* and grapple with questions relating to Yuna myths about the great flood (*mu-u*), the identity of *Hone Hewa Tawalipa*, whom our fathers related to as One-up-in-the-sky, the origin of the laws and by-laws of the Yuna, which are very close to those of the Bible, such as, prohibiting adultery, stealing, killing, lying, betrayal,

⁷⁵ Telford. Interview, March 2010.

poisoning, dishonouring parents, and many others.⁷⁶ History, and the heroic acts of dead relatives, are often told and retold through rhyme, poetry, and through normal story-telling, which has always been a very effective way of passing on information. Therefore, these methods must be utilised again for those who find formal Bible teaching, reading, and writing too difficult.

Gould suggested that local Huli teachers and preachers should be involved in formal learning, and teaching of literacy, and preaching and teaching in local churches.⁷⁷ However, this approach may take time in the Yuna context, because it is 20 years since the Lake Kopiago Station had a primary school, with enough teachers to provide effective teaching for the people. There is at least one whole generation of children who have not received formal education.⁷⁸

The bulk of Yuna people today must be reached with the story of *Hone Hewa Tawalipa*, by story-telling in the gardens, on the roads, and elsewhere in the community, using stories that are appropriate to the theme and culture. An excellent example of this is in Gen 2:15, where God made man and put him in the Garden to look after it.⁷⁹ Gardening and marriage go together in the Yuna culture. Young women are told to marry young men, who can make a garden. Newly-married men were not asked or expected to be involved in tribal fights, but, instead, each should stay home with his new wife, and in the garden. Where did the importance of gardening and

⁷⁶ Helen Telford. Interview by author, through skype, CLTC, April, 2010. This particular law was very strong in the Yuna culture, as a pioneer missionary confirmed. Part of the discipline for children caught stealing was to chop off their fingers. Brian and Helen Telford went into the Yuna land of Arou in 1969, only five years after the Yuna people had seen their first white person.

⁷⁷ Gould, "Vernacular Bible Reading", p. 281.

⁷⁸ Nicole Haley, "HIV/AIDS and Witchcraft at Lake Kopiago", in *Catalyst* 39-2 (2009), p. 116.

⁷⁹ It may have been a coincidence, but one of the qualities of a real man in the Yuna culture is that you must be a gardener; you must have a garden of your own. And the three qualities of a woman that a man looks for, before asking her for marriage, is that she is able to do gardening, raise pigs, and have children. (The two qualities of gardening and having children go back right to the beginning, in Eden – gardening and multiplying.)

marriage, in the Yuna culture, come from? According to the Bible, the first man was created and placed in a garden to care for and tend it. The mark of real men and women in the Yuna culture is that they must have a garden. Today, through storytelling, churches must include “knowing the Creator” as part of being a real man, because the Bible says Adam knew his Creator before he was told of his responsibility to work the garden (Gen 2:7, 15).

The Yuna were told of the term “ground finish”, which is very well understood, and described by Haley as, “a tendency towards decline and disorder is the natural state of the world. It is on this basis that environmental and social changes are interpreted and understood.”⁸⁰ However, the Yuna version of “ground finish” is now seen in a change of attitude of this Yuna generation. There is now an attitude of not caring about the laws and codes that guided the decisions made by individuals in the past. Instead, there are evidences of selfishness and greed, with disregard for the benefits for the whole clan, tribe, or people, and their beliefs, in terms of respect and loyalty. Is the HIV/AIDS epidemic, among the Yuna, the result of individuals, who have such an attitude towards their own bodies and lives, as well as those innocent people whom they infect knowingly? Is this the generation of Yuna, who are bringing the most feared “ground finish” upon themselves and their children, with this kind of reckless behaviour? Why are Yuna young people, especially men, blaming suspected HIV/AIDS deaths on sorcery and *sanguma*?⁸¹ This way of thinking has to be one of the Yuna fathers’ most-feared social problems, which they described as “ground finish”.

COMPARE, CONTRAST, AND APPRECIATE YUNA CULTURE TODAY

This is the message young Yuna today must hear and understand. Respect and reverence for *Hone Hewa Tawalipa*, the Supreme Spirit of our fathers, must be a part of their heritage, their pride, and their identity, because the Hela Yuna cannot be separated from the Supreme Spirit, whom their fathers revered and acknowledged. They need to pass this story on to their children, like they do with genealogies, *bigono*, and land rights, *malu*. The

⁸⁰ Haley, “HIV/AIDS and Witchcraft at Lake Kapiago”, p. 121.

⁸¹ Ibid.

people of Israel, in the Old Testament, were reminded, again and again, about the importance of telling their children the stories of their experiences with the God of their fathers, about how they went into their land, *bigono*, and their story, as descendants of Abraham, *malu*.

In Yuna culture, one must prove his worth in any field, like in tribal fights, land disputes, hunting, farming, leadership, speechmaking, and in believing and respecting the norms and laws of nature, and of the spirits, as everyone in the community should do, resulting in one earning approval and respect by the community.⁸² In the same way, believing and accepting Yuna belief in the Supreme Spirit, *Hone Hewa Tawalipa*, cannot be separated from Yuna people, in any generation. Our fathers sensed Him, respected Him, and held Him in high regard. The Supreme Spirit, *Hone Hewa Tawalipa*, was a big part of Yuna everyday life. He was part of their past, and He was their future. Therefore, to forsake Him today, and have no respect for Him, will be, in fact, rejecting the Yuna identity, and becoming someone else.

WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED? WHEN SHOULD IT START? WHERE, HOW, AND WHY?

Bible Schools and church denominations, in the land of the Yuna, must take the lead now, rather than later. Denominations that can be involved include Christian Brethren churches (CBC), the Catholic church, the Seventh-day Adventists (SDA), Christian Apostolic Fellowship (CAF), and the Evangelical Lutheran churches of Papua New Guinea (ELCPNG). The Lutherans and the CAF have a very good working relationship with the CBC, and this positive feature could very well enhance the challenge to reach out to Yuna men and women about the need to revisit the dreams of their fathers. Christian Brethren churches currently have three Bible Schools operating in strategic locations in the land of the Yuna: one in the Pori Valley, and two in the Tumbudu Valley, at Kelabo and Arou.⁸³ CAF has a Bible School at Hirane in Lake Kopiago. These teams of Bible

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ *Tumbudu* is the local name given for the Strickland River, which finds its headwaters in the land of the Yuna, towards the Lavani Valley.

Schools and churches must think and work as one, as Yuna, with their focus on the young people, who will be leaders of their people tomorrow. In this issue, the way forward for them, and their children, has to be a “we” ministry and approach, “not me, or my denomination” approach.⁸⁴ Because the issue now concerns the Yuna people, no matter what part of the land of the Yuna they come from, or to what church denomination they belong.

Churches must teach the book of Genesis, comparing it with what they learn in schools today. The evolution theory that says it all started by chance must be challenged at all costs by sound biblical teaching about the mighty power of *Hone Hewa Tawalipa*, God, the Supreme Spirit. In doing so, church leaders must take the lead in teaching young people on important biblical doctrines, in a programmed, uniform, systematic way. Though, it may take time to wait to teach in English, it is not that hard to teach young people today, in this way, using Tok Pisin. This is because these Bible Schools are taught in Tok Pisin, and, most importantly, literacy programs are also a part of the curriculum of most of the Bible Schools mentioned. The reasons for the urgency for programs to be started right away, and why it should be organised, are twofold:

Firstly, the younger Yuna generation is quickly being influenced by the outside world, and its way of thinking, thus making it difficult for them to remember the importance of the dreams and yearnings of their fathers, especially their yearning for freedom from fear of death, and of the evil spirits, the *rama*. Secondly, Papua New Guinea’s liquefied natural gas (LNG) project is hosted by the recently-granted Hela Province, of which Hela Yuna is a part, and the social issues, like the spread of HIV/AIDS, tribal fights, land disputes, breakdown in cultural norms, and of families, drug and alcohol abuse, youths not completing formal education, but, instead, going to work for money, and all the problems related to it, when economic activities, which have never been seen before, are taking place on the doorstep. Churches must step up and face the challenge by using their institutions as places where Yuna men and women can be taught and

⁸⁴ Isaac Pulupe, Tuesday Chapel preaching, Banz PNG: CLTC, September 7, 2010.

reminded of who they are, where they stand today, and what their future has for them, in relation to what was foretold by their forefathers.

However, on a positive note, the God of the Bible is not someone unknown, rather He is One for whom Yuna people have always been dreaming, yearning, and hoping. Explaining and educating should begin with the question of all things having a beginning, all things having a cause, and all things having a purpose; and the question of who is mankind in relation to God. Can Yuna people truly believe the myths that they are children of the eagle, the pig, the cassowary, the dog, and the possum? However, the revealed Word of *Hone Hewa Tawalipa* tells us that He is the Creator of all things, including mankind (Gen 1-2). In doing so, the central question, for which we must find an answer, is the identity of *Hone Hewa Tawalipa*, and how our fathers related to Him as the One-up-in-the-sky. We must also provide answers to the origin of the laws and by-laws of the Yuna, which are very close to those of the Bible. Whatever way people may look at these laws, they still remain a part of who the Yuna people are today. It is part of their heritage and identity, therefore, it needs to be respected, and, most importantly, passed on to their children.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article was to demonstrate to contemporary Yuna men and women the reason why their fathers responded, as one man, to the gospel, when they heard it from the missionaries. In doing so, we have examined evidence of people's beliefs in a Supreme Spirit in different cultures of the world. We have also looked at beliefs in the Bible, and how individuals responded, in their own way, and at different times. After all these findings and discussions, we must conclude the things we have discussed. Yuna people, today, cannot be separated from the past, because the past is their identity – where they came from – and it forms part of what they will be in the future. This does not only concern Yuna men, women, and children alone, but also their land, rivers, and mountains. The decisions they make, the things they do and say, today, are part and parcel of this whole picture, because that was the way their fathers saw it in the past. Now is the time for Yuna young people to think deeply, and ask

questions about who they are, from where they have come, and where are they going? On the same note, we need to be asking where the primitive Yuna got these ideas of the end of the world, and all other related prophecies? Who put these thoughts into their hearts? The Bible answers the question (Acts 17:27). It says God, the Creator, designed, and put that space in every human being. The desire and yearning to seek the Creator was already placed in every human heart.

Therefore, the yearnings of the Yuna people were not in vain, nor isolated to themselves, rather, it was put in them by the now-revealed *Hone Hewa Tawalipa*, God. Finally, but most importantly, every Yuna today must realise and accept the dreams and the yearnings of their forefathers, as they farm, hunt, fish, walk, and live on the land. Theirs was a yearning and a dream to live and not to die, a dream and yearning to have intimacy with *Hone Hewa Tawalipa*, and not to cut up pigs, and give them to the *rama*, evil spirits of water and stone, the death spirits. They had dreams of hope, and not despair, a longing to be free from fear. This was not only for themselves, but also for their children, who survived the fury, and the never-satisfied hunger for Yuna blood by their enemy, the *rama* evil spirits. An attitude of ignorance towards these dreams and yearnings will be an insult to them.

Consequences for such an attitude have already been foretold, like dying at a young age, the land not producing as expected, pigs not growing big and multiplying, and social disorder (also known as “ground finish”).⁸⁵ Therefore, the onus is now on young Yuna men and women today to revisit the dreams of their fathers, which can only find its true meaning in *Hone Hewa Tawalipa* of the Hala Yuna, because He was the One who designed this yearning in the Yuna heart that even the *rama* evil spirits could not satisfy. Why did *Hone Hewa Tawalipa* put this yearning in the human mind? The answer is found in Acts 17:27, “He could be sought and found, He is not that far away.” The way Yuna people responded to the revelation of the Supreme Spirit has clearly shown their realisation of the One, for whom they have been yearning to have intimacy with for generations.

⁸⁵ Haley, “HIV/AIDS and Witchcraft at Lake Kapiago”, p. 121.

Therefore, today's Yuna men, women, and children must do something, personally, and as a people group, about their fathers' dreams and yearnings, which have now been realised through the gospel message, which is in our hands today.

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READING THE BIBLE THROUGH THE CORRESPONDENCE OF THE ESCHATOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS: THE BIBLE AND OURS

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INTRODUCTION

One aspect of hermeneutical discussions constitutes an attempt to apply the scriptures to the contemporary situation.¹ This is a notion, which appears to have already been utilised in the Bible. The books of 1 and 2 Chronicles, for instance, can be taken as a reappropriation of the story told from 1 Samuel to 2 Kings, to the post-exilic community. Even Josephus' retelling of the story of Israel appears to be an attempt to set forth the idea that the

¹ I have in view here the insight of Graeme Goldsworthy that the hermeneutical task properly includes: (1) exegesis, the attempt to understand what was said by the author to his intended audience; (2) hermeneutics, the attempt to understand the relevance of the ancient text to the contemporary situation; and (3) homiletics, the application of the ancient text to the contemporary audience. See G. Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom: A Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament* (Exeter UK: Paternoster Press, 1981), p. 43. I am not convinced by the contention of Brian A. Shealy that there is, in the contemporary hermeneutical discussion, a need to reassert the distinction between hermeneutics and application. The semantic import of the term "hermeneutics" is admittedly slippery, to be contained by a strait-jacket definition, but there appears to be an expansion of its semantic scope from the set of rules for biblical interpretation to also embrace the application of those rules to the text, in order to recover its meaning for the contemporary situation. See B. A. Shealy, "Redrawing the Line Between Hermeneutics and Application", in R. L. Thomas, ed., *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old* (Grand Rapids MI: Kregel Publications, 2002), pp. 165-194.

history of Israel has now arrived at its fulfilment in his contemporary situation, with the elevation of Vespasian as Roman emperor. Perhaps the way in which Ps 18 is included in the narrative of David in 2 Sam 22 represents an attempt to provide it with a new literary setting, and thus, making it relevant in another historical setting. The same trend can be detected in the New Testament, with Paul's retelling of the story of Israel, claiming that it has reached fulfilment in the resurrection of Jesus (e.g., Acts 13). In hermeneutical discussions, a number of proposals have been put forward as possible ways in which the Bible can be made contemporaneous with us.

R. BULTMANN

In one sense, Rudolf Bultmann's demythologisation program was an attempt at contemporising the biblical message from a negative direction.² He seems to have struggled with the question of how the New Testament message can be appropriated by a modern person. Bultmann identified the major hindrance in such an attempt with what he observed as the mythological framework of New Testament eschatology. Included in this mythological framework is the three-tiered universe, in which there is heaven above, and hell below. Thus, in order to make the biblical proclamation relevant to the contemporary situation, one must retrieve the non-mythological elements from the predominantly mythological framework of the New Testament, thus demythologising the biblical document.

The problem with Bultmann's demythologising program, however, is that, once it is accomplished, we are left, not with the central message of Jesus and the Apostles, but, rather, with their moral examples, as existential paradigms for modern human beings. The "gospel" that was foundational to that moral concern has been fundamentally overlooked, since it is supposedly mythological. Consequently, we are left with a gospel-less morality – precisely the thing, from which Jesus and the Apostles sought to rescue their contemporaries.

² See R. Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (London UK: SCM Press, 1958).

JAMES D. SMART

James D. Smart believes that the success of contemporising the Bible depends on students of the Bible fully immersing themselves, not only in the biblical world, but also in the contemporary world. In other words, the Bible interpreter must live in two worlds.³ Only by living in these two worlds at once would the Bible interpreter recognise that he/she is living, not in two worlds at one time, but in one world. The two worlds become one, in the sense that the Bible analogously becomes a “magic glass”, through which we look to see ourselves, our neighbours, and our world, as they really are.

Smart’s insight is to be applauded for his recognition of the distinction between the textual world and the contemporary world of the biblical interpreter, as well as the necessity for students to immerse themselves in both, and, thus, to become, not only an astute student of the biblical writers, but also to be people of their own time, being sensitive to current issues that might confront their audience. Nonetheless, the dynamic, in which the biblical world becomes a “magic glass”, through which reality can be observed, needs to be nuanced more carefully and clearly. The question as to what proper sense, in which one might assume the biblical world as a “magic glass”, is not satisfactorily answered by Smart. The present study intends to indicate precisely one possibility, in which this may be made possible.

N. T. WRIGHT

N. T. Wright argues that the Bible is structurally analogous to a four-act Shakespearian play, whose “fifth act” has been lost.⁴ In other words, the Bible consists of four distinctive “acts” of God’s drama for Israel, climaxing in the coming of Jesus of Nazareth. The missing “fifth act” is God’s activities in the contemporary situation. Since there is no direct word of revelation from God to us today, Wright suggests that we need

³ See J. D. Smart, *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church: A Study in Hermeneutics* (London UK: SCM Press, 1970), p. 163.

⁴ See N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol 1 (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1992), pp. 140-143.

“actors”, who have completely immersed themselves in the first four “acts” of God’s drama, so much so, that they could perform what is the contents of the fifth “act”, as if Shakespeare himself would have written it. Given that the current postmodern situation is characterised by a widespread ignorance of the biblical plot line, Wright’s suggestion, even though sound, is, nonetheless, rendered impossible as an undertaking. Ultimately, it would induce a situation quite similar to that in Judges, where “everyone did as he saw fit” (Jdg 21:25).

JOSHUA NG

Joshua Ng observes three paradigms, in which the Old Testament scriptures are being made contemporaneous in the New Testament.⁵

- (1) Ng observes that the cultural differences between God’s people in the Old Testament, and those in Paul’s contemporaries, did not prevent the direct application of the Old Testament to those in the New Testament, as God’s word. Hence, the temptations Israel faced in the wilderness become the foundation of Paul’s warning to the Corinthian believers not to succumb to temptations in their social setting (1 Cor 10:1-22).
- (2) Ng also observes the opposite scenario, where the culture remains constant, and yet, there are different applications of God’s word. For instance, while 1st-century Jews maintained the same culture as those, to whom Leviticus was written, yet animal sacrifices were no longer applicable to believers, as indicated by the author of Hebrews (Heb 10:1-7).
- (3) Finally, Ng detects that, even if historical situations differ between the Old Testament audience and those in the New, the same application of God’s word can be made to them. Thus, for the Sadducees’ misunderstanding of the resurrection (Mark 10:18-27), Jesus shows that their dullness is the direct result

⁵ See J. Ng, “Jumping the Gap”, in *Briefings* 217 (1998), pp. 5-11, see pp. 7-9.

of not understanding the word God spoke to “them”, and then He went on to cite Ex 3:6 – a passage that was spoken to Moses in the wilderness.

CORRESPONDENCE OF ESCHATOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS: THE PROPHETS AND OURS

I wish to propose, in addition, to the categories observed by Ng, that the fundamental similarities between the general features of the prophetic eschatological framework and ours, in the contemporary situation, enables the prophetic message to be appropriated by us, in our contemporary situation.

THE PROPHETIC ESCHATOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Undoubtedly, it is impossible to offer an exhaustive portrait of all the fine details relating to the prophetic eschatological framework. Nevertheless, I observe that a homogeneous view of prophetic eschatology was commonplace in Israel in the time immediately leading up to the Exile, as attested in the pre-exilic prophets. By prophetic eschatology, what is envisaged is the cardinal content of the prophetic message about the End that was impending to them and their audience.

A few broad strokes of the conceptual brush are required to provide an adequate approximation of prophetic eschatology. Several features appear prominent in prophetic predictions about the End. Almost all the pre-exilic prophets were charged with the responsibility of announcing God’s impending judgment to their audience, and summoning them towards repentance. In fact, it was the distinctive mark of the false prophet to predict imminent good fortune and prosperity for Israel during the pre-exilic time (e.g., Jer 23:16-18). In general terms, several prominent features tend to stand out in the administration of the prophetic ministry in pre-exilic times.

Firstly, the beginning of their prophetic ministry is marked by the “coming” of the word of the Lord to the individual prophet in the form of a call to prophetic ministry. Perhaps the most famous, in this respect, is the call of

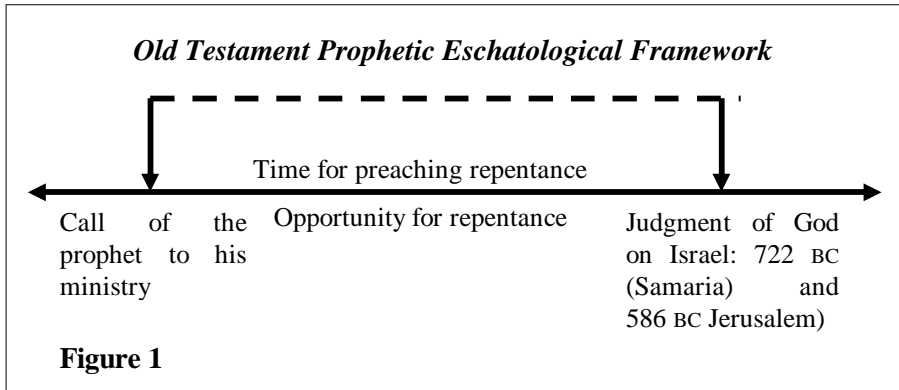
Jeremiah to the prophetic office (Jer 1:5-10). The foundation of the prophet's call was God's covenantal commitment to Israel.

Secondly, the main role of the prophets is to proclaim the word of God to their contemporary situation. Among the latter prophets, the word of the Lord was dominated by the announcement that the End was approaching (e.g., Amos 8:3; Ezek 7:6). This End is described as an impending catastrophic event, political in nature, but also possessing theological and spiritual overtones. Thus, to the northern kingdom, the End that Amos proclaimed, even though it was fulfilled in the Assyrian captivity, is connected with the approaching "day of the Lord" (Amos 5:18-20). The message of the false prophets was distinctively against this message of doom. In the time of impending wrath upon God's people, false prophets proclaimed a message of peace and prosperity, thus securing the people in their stubbornness, and failing to appropriate the message of the true prophets.

A third component of the prophetic eschatological message was the exhortation of God's people, in their contemporary situation, towards repentance. God promised to withhold the catastrophe that He intended to bring upon Israel, if they repented and turned to Him, through obeying the covenant (Ezek 18:31-32). This was supposed to be their principal message. Again, it was the false prophets that propagated the counter-message that there was no need for repentance, since the Lord's goodness would continue to abound for Israel in days to come.

Fourthly, the prophets were not only declaring doomsday to Israel, but also the hope of transformation. Even though, the "day of the Lord" was a "day of darkness", there was a better day awaiting Israel in the future, with God promising a "new heaven and a new earth" (Is 65:17-18; cf. Amos 9:11-15). Especially with the pre-exilic prophets, even though their message was dominated by warnings of a coming national disaster upon Israel, God also wished to tell Israel that His faithfulness to the covenant would not ultimately be thwarted by their unfaithfulness. Through His prophets, the Lord declares, not only a message of impending destruction, but also of future restoration, on a cosmic scale.

These features of the prophetic eschatological framework can be represented in diagrammatic form as follows:



THE CONTEMPORARY ESCHATOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

We can hardly obtain the prominent features of the contemporary eschatological framework with relative ease, as has been the case in deriving the prophetic eschatological framework. In order to adequately estimate the conceptual depiction of this phenomenon, a number of preliminary considerations are in place.

Firstly, despite the apparent diversity of the biblical document, there is an amazing unity presupposed throughout by the coherence of its basic story line. Secondly, it is also instructive to bear in mind that the biblical narrative framework includes in its scope the beginning in creation, and the consummation in the new creation. This important observation prevents us from concurring with Wright's proposal, outlined above.

Thirdly, then, if the coherence of the scope of the biblical grand narrative involves the beginning, in creation, and the end, in the new creation, then, it follows, that our contemporary situation, insofar as we are living after the coming of Jesus, and His expected return, and eagerly anticipating the new creation, belongs within the biblical narrative framework. It is this sense of belonging within the narrative framework that we shall utilise as foundational to the suggestion for making the Bible contemporaneous in

this paper. We shall try to identify where we rightly belong in the flow of biblical narrative, in the hope that this would clarify, for us, how we may appropriate the word of God, spoken in the past.

Fourthly, an important presupposition, which underlies the proposal set forth in this paper, is that the narrative framework of the Bible corresponds to a historical continuum, in which the described events occurred in reality. The way in which this correspondence is made is entirely beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, a growing community of scholars have appealed to the fact that the biblical documents were written to be believed. In fact, this implies, among other things, that biblical scholarship must drop its default hermeneutics of suspicion and seek, rather, a hermeneutics of reconciliation, in which it should try to befriend the text. With these suppositions in mind, let us try to recover the eschatological framework of the contemporary situation.

According to the New Testament, we are living in the period between the first coming of Jesus and His return, to bring judgment on the living and the dead. Some have referred to this duration as the “in-between-time”, or the “interim period”. The New Testament nowhere refers to the period in view in these terms. It would be instructive, here, to find out how New Testament writers understood the period of time, in which they were living.

A convenient point of departure, in this consideration, is Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17-36). In that sermon, Peter tries to help the Jerusalemites to understand the phenomenon of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which they have just witnessed. Drawing on a citation from Joel 2, Peter claims that the descent of the Spirit confirms that Jesus is both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:33-36). The Holy Spirit’s outpouring signifies the fulfilment of what the Lord promised would happen “in the last days” (Acts 2:17). In context, the “last days” constitute the duration before the coming of the dreadful day of the Lord, the Day of Judgment (Acts 2:20).

In that light, the duration between the first coming of Jesus, and the anticipated day of the Lord, constitute the last days. The dreadful day of the Lord is described by Paul to his Athenian audience in the Areopagus to

be the day God has fixed for the judgment of the world (Acts 17:3-31). Elsewhere, Paul affirms that we must all appear before the judgment throne of Christ to give an account of the things we did in the body, whether good or evil (2 Cor 5:10).

Even though there is certainty about the impending judgment, the New Testament professed ignorance, when it came to specifying when it will happen (Acts 1:7). In fact, Jesus, and even Paul, spoke of the Day of Judgment as, unsuspectingly, coming upon the world, like a thief in the night (1 Thess 5:1; Luke 12:39-40). Even though judgment dominates the New Testament message about the future, it is not the sole emphasis. There is, moreover, the message about the resurrection of the body, and the expected revelation of the sons and daughters of God, in the glorious transformation of the New Jerusalem, the new earth, and the new heavens (1 Cor 15; Rev 21-22).

This anticipation of God's impending judgment of the living and the dead becomes the proper context for understanding the apostolic message of Christ crucified. Even Jesus' proclamation that the "time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is coming near" (Mark 1:15) is another way of expressing the impending Day of Judgment. Jesus announced that the fulfilment of time constitutes the dynamic of the coming of God's long-awaited "favourable time". It is the time for repentance, and for the forgiveness of sins, in the name of Jesus. In this connection, Paul described the present as the "fulfilment of the ages" (1 Cor 10:11). It is the time for the forgiveness of sins, based on repentance, to be proclaimed, beginning in Jerusalem, and stretching out to the ends of the earth (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). This explains the preoccupation of the Apostles and the early church with the proclamation of Christ crucified. If the future of the present creation is the dreadful day of the Lord, is it not the most logical undertaking to appeal to all people to be reconciled to God through Christ?

We have seen that the principal role of the ancient prophets was the proclamation of God's word to their contemporary situation, and that God's word was an exhortation towards repentance, in view of the impending judgment. In the "last days", or the "fulfilment of the ages", the

prophetic role of proclaiming repentance has been entrusted by Jesus, not only to His Apostles (Luke 24:44-47; Acts 1:8), but also to those who proclaim the gospel (1 Peter 1:10-12). Peter strengthens the assimilation by the gospel preachers of the message of the ancient prophets, by indicating that the gospel preacher is called, by the death of Jesus, to the task of proclaiming the message. While the word of God came to the ancient prophets, it is the word of the cross that calls the gospel preacher to the role of preaching the gospel.

In summary, the eschatological time frame of our current situation consists of the expectation of the dreadful day of the Lord's judgment. This characterises life's anticipation between the first coming of Jesus and His second coming. It implies that the "today" of Jesus, and of the New Testament writers, embrace even our contemporary situation today, in its scope, since we still live with the expectation of the return of Jesus. Today is an opportunity, not only to proclaim the word of the cross, but also for the daily exhortation of believers to remain faithful until Jesus' return (cf. Heb 10:24-25). This can be represented in diagrammatic form as follows:

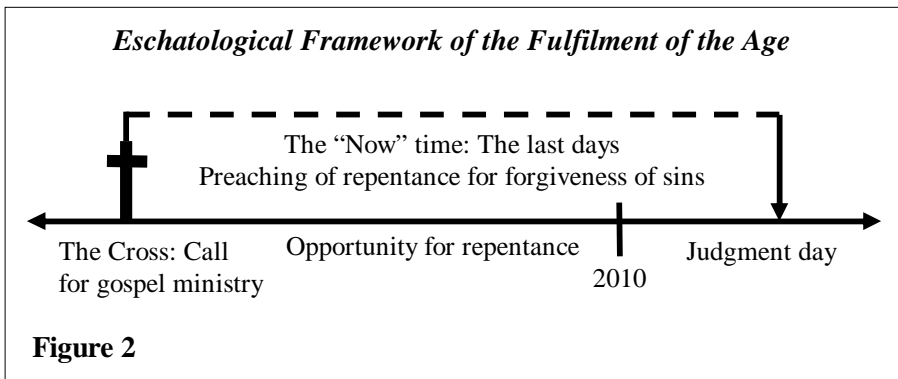


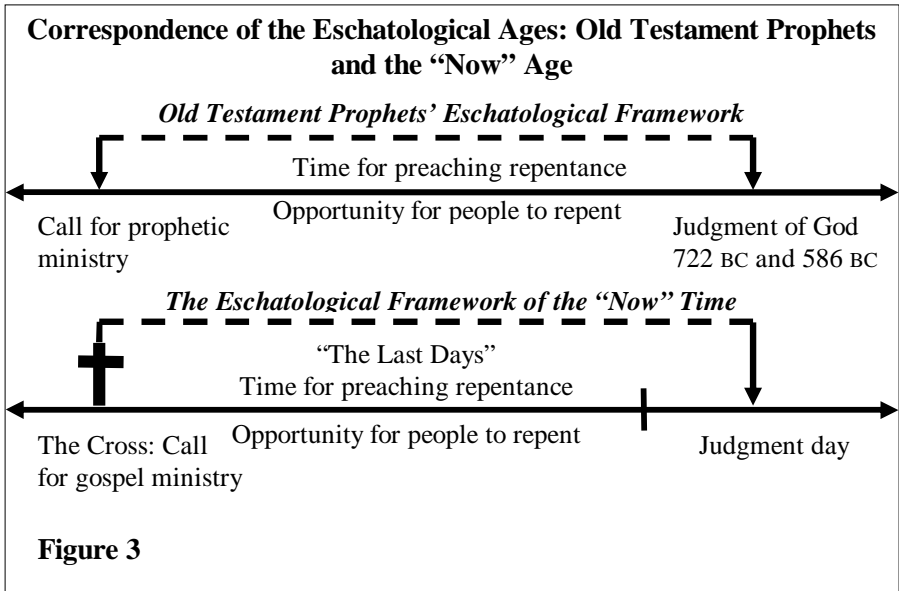
Figure 2

CORRESPONDENCE OF ESCHATOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The important point is the recognition that, similar to the contemporaries of the Old Testament prophets, we are also living under the dreadful near-expectation of the impending judgment day. Because of the structural similarity of the eschatological time frame, in which we now live, to that of

the Old Testament prophets, God's message for them can also become God's word for us here and now. The announcement of judgment to them should become the announcement of the impending judgment of God to us today. Just as the message of coming judgment to them was meant to turn them back to God in repentance, so also, is the message of the gospel to us today. It urges us to turn to God and "wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath" (1 Thess 1:10). In view, therefore, of the judgment to come, Paul urges Timothy, his young associate, to "preach the Word" (2 Tim 4:1-4).

There is, of course, a real sense in which the word of God is clearer to us, here and now, than it was to the prophets, and their contemporaries, there and then. They did not have Jesus Christ, the "word in flesh", then (John 1:14). Jesus' coming heightens the urgency of the prophetic message of repentance for us here and now. We are rendered inexcusable for not believing in God's word, the Bible, with its solemn declaration to us that salvation is found in Christ Jesus alone, and that justification for our sins is graciously attainable through His blood, by faith alone (Acts 4:12; Rom 3:23-24). We must, therefore, make every effort to turn to God now, while we still have the opportunity to do so, before either death or judgment catches up with us. Figure 3, below, shows how the eschatological framework of the prophets corresponds to the time frame, in which we currently live in "these last days".



IMPLICATIONS FOR THEOLOGICAL CONTEXTUALISATION IN THE PACIFIC TODAY

As a result of the similarities between the eschatological time frame, in which we now live, and those of the Old Testament prophets, I wish to give four reflections on how contextualisation could be done in the Pacific, in a way more in line with the biblical storyline.

- (1) If contextualisation is trying to replant Christianity in the Pacific context, in terms of our culture, history, stories, and personal experiences,⁶ then, we must realise that the essential nature of the “tree” (i.e., Christianity) that we wish to replant in our Pacific context is eschatological – that is, the gospel speaks of the “last things”, namely, of repentance, because of the coming day of judgment, in which Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead, and to establish the kingdom of

⁶ See M. Palu, “Pacific Theology: A Reconsideration of Its Methodology”, in *Pacific Journal of Theology* 29 (2003), pp. 30-58, esp. pp. 32-34.

God in the new creation. Thus far, most attempts at theological contextualisation in the Pacific tend to overlook the eschatological element of the good news about Jesus. Actually, Christianity does not just teach us ways to live, here in the Pacific, in the present time. It teaches us to live the life of the coming kingdom of God, here in the Pacific, until it is fully realised when Jesus returns.

- (2) Another view of contextualisation in the Pacific involves the retelling of our personal stories from the viewpoint of a Pacific Islander, in order to explain the values that we hold dear.⁷ However, we must see our personal stories within the context of the big story of God's dealing with humanity, in Jesus. That is, we must not retell our stories merely as Pacific Islanders, but as Pacific Islanders who are living under the Lordship of the risen Jesus, and expecting His return. In that light, the fact that I eat green bananas, and wear a special hat to church on Sunday, as a Tongan, are unique ways in which God has made me a Pacific Islander member of His family. In other words, my personal story, as a Pacific Islander, is consumed and reshaped by the big story of God's dealing with humanity in Jesus Christ in such a way that even the cultural and personal values I adopt are in line with the kingdom of God's values. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor 5:10 NIV).
- (3) We must learn to see Pacific contextual theology as a reflection on how to live in the Pacific context during the "last days" – the short time, during which we are living, before the dreadful judgment of God arrives. That is, we need to understand that we have been living in the last days ever since

⁷ See K. A. Kanongata'a, "Why Contextual", in *Pacific Journal of Theology* 27 (2002), pp. 21-40.

the first coming of Jesus. This means that we should not listen to those who make their Christianity out of interpreting the daily news, to find out when the last days will arrive. The New Testament believers lived in the last days, and so do we, since we live in the same time frame as they did, between the first coming and the return of Jesus. Hence, we should seek to think, theologically, about how best to preach repentance to our people here in the Pacific. If doing so means we must use our culture, and our personal stories, to make the gospel better understood by our people, then we should do so. But there is a need to avoid the kind of contextual reflections that seek to understand aspects of the biblical storyline, in terms of our culture, but have no application to our lives as Pacific Islanders, living with the expectation of the impending judgment of God, when Jesus returns.

- (4) Given that the similarities between the time frame of the Old Testament prophets and the time, during which we live, allows for their message of repentance, in view of the coming judgment, to also become our message. In view of the return of Jesus, to judge the living and the dead, there is a pressing need to understand that the Bible has its own way of making its message applicable to us. That is, it is a mistaken view to think that the Bible is irrelevant for us today, and, therefore, there is a need to contextualise. Contextualisation, indeed, is necessary, but it should be seen in terms of illustrating and applying biblical truths, and not an attempt to make it relevant to us here in the Pacific. If the Bible is, as it claims to be, namely, the living word of God (Heb 4:12; cf. 2 Tim 3:16), then we always need to begin our contextual theological reflection with the view that scripture is relevant to us today. Our task, as Pacific theologians, is one of applying that living word to our people, in ways that directly address the many problems they currently face.