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AN EXPLORATORY MISSIOLOGICAL STUDY OF MELANESIAN ANCESTRAL HERITAGE FROM AN INDIGENOUS EVANGELICAL PERSPECTIVE

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

School of Studies in Religion, University of Sydney

by Joshua Kurung Daimoi
June 2004
I testify that the substance of this thesis, approximately 92,903 words (excluding footnotes and bibliography), has not previously been submitted for any degree, and is not currently being submitted for any other degree.

I also certify that any assistance received in conducting the research embodied in the thesis, and all quotations and source of significant ideas and paraphrases, have been acknowledged in the text or notes.

Joshua K. Daimoi
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ABSTRACT

This is an exploratory missiological study of the relationship between Melanesian ancestral heritage and Christianity, or Melanesian ancestors and Jesus. Over 100 years ago Christianity was practically non-existent in Melanesia. Today, 96 percent of Papua New Guinea's population of five million people identify themselves as Christians.

In spite of the strong Christian influence, Christianity is still considered to be white-people's religion. Melanesians are a community-oriented people, and the ancestors continue to dominate the lives of the people.

This thesis addresses the relationship between the influence Melanesian ancestors exert on the people through the ancestral Lo they had passed on to them and the influence of Jesus Christ through the teachings of Christianity. The following thesis is tested:

There exists a real and helpful relationship between Melanesian ancestral spirits and the Gospel which allows Melanesians to move from faith in the spirits of their ancestors to faith in Jesus Christ with cultural integrity and continuity.

A number of propositions (corresponding to chapters two to seven) are considered in this thesis.

(i) Melanesians are a religious and rational people. As primal religionists their belief, centred in the ancestors, is both logical and practical.

(ii) Meaningful and effective contextualization of the Gospel calls for careful understanding of the relationship between beliefs in ancestral spirits and Jesus Christ.

(iii) The Sentanian culture (in which the author grew up), especially in its leadership structure, yields a possible way for contextualizing the Gospel in the larger Melanesian context.

(iv) The priesthood of Jesus in the Epistle to the Hebrews – a case study from the Bible – provides a meaningful understanding of the relationship between Jesus and the Melanesian ancestors.

(v) In the interface between the introduced mission message(s) and indigenous tradition, the element in Christianity surpassing Melanesian ancestral heritage is the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus, based on the power of an 'indestructible life'.
PREFACE

While I am fully responsible for the content of this thesis, I have been greatly encouraged by many people.

For their support, friendship and hospitality, I express my deep gratitude to the Principals, the faculty, staff and students of the Bible College of New Zealand (BCNZ), the Bible College of Victoria (BCV), and the Sydney Missionary and Bible College (SMBC), where I spent time writing parts of this thesis.

Many former friends and colleagues of CLTC from Australia and New Zealand generously supported us as a family during our stay in New Zealand. It is difficult to name them all but to each one we say a very sincere thank you.

We are very grateful to Dr. John Hitchen and his wife Ann for the use of their house, and to Garth and Ruth Morgan for loaning us one of their vehicles to tour New Zealand. We thank these two families for their friendship and hospitality, and for making our stay in Aotearoa most memorable. To the members of the New Zealand CLTC Advisory Council we extend our sincere thanks.

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I must now express my utmost gratitude to my supervisor Prof. Garry W. Trompf of the School of Religion of the University Sydney, for his deep personal interest in me and my study; for hours of meticulous reading through and correcting all the drafts submitted to him; for his many insightful comments based on his thorough knowledge of the Melanesian world; and for his genuine friendship. I remember the first time I walked into his office, he greeted me with a big smile, and a big Melanesian hug, and eagerly offered to break his lunch with me – the Melanesian way to celebrate our reunion. Thank you, Garry.

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Pasadena, California – a qualifying paper toward this doctorate – and for seeing me through the initial stages of this project while, as a family, we lived in Henderson, New Zealand.

I record my deep gratitude for the generous financial support received from the World Evangelical Fellowship. I am deeply indebted and utterly grateful to the Council of CLTC for seeing me through to the completion of this thesis. I am very grateful indeed for the support and encouragement received from the Missionary Aviation Fellowship of Australia and Papua New Guinea, and the Summer Institute of Linguistics of Papua New Guinea, and Mr. Judah Akesim, a former MP from Brugam in East Sepik, Papua New Guinea.

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I place on record my gratitude to the Sentanian people, their koseros and ondoporos, and the Christian missionaries whose influence have shaped my life and faith in Jesus.

I gratefully acknowledge the ministries exercised by Bruce Renich, Dr. Ross Weymouth, and Patrick Gaiyer, as principals of the College while I have been on study leave. I am thankful to all the staff, students, and workers of CLTC for their prayerful encouragement and patience.
Finally, but far from least, I honour my wife Mone, our children Mason, Joanna, and Evelyn, for their patience and whole-hearted encouragement to press on when at times I felt like giving up. To Bradley, our first-born, who unexpectedly departed from this world in 1990 at the age of 18 into the presence of Jesus, for the legacy of his faith and his pleasant personality which continue to spur me on to hold tightly on to my own faith. For, as this thesis amply testifies, the dead are forever more alive, so Brad lives on in our lives.

And so, to the Sentanian _ondoporos_ and _koseros_, the past, present, and future students and staff of CLTC, and to each one of my family, I gladly dedicate this thesis that they might know their cultural and Christian roots, and learn to hold firmly to their faith in Christ for their eternal salvation.

Above everything and everyone else, I praise the God of my salvation without whose faithfulness and sustaining grace I would not have made it. To Him be all the glory.
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<td>abu-ako</td>
<td>messenger, priest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aka</td>
<td>older sibling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>akera</td>
<td>jungle, gardening bushes</td>
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<tr>
<td>ana</td>
<td>below, on the ground, mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ayeh</td>
<td>father, retaliatory spirit of the dead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bu</td>
<td>water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bukera</td>
<td>waters, rivers, areas covered with water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bumana</td>
<td>above, superior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>humanatere</td>
<td>the highest, supreme</td>
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<tr>
<td>buna</td>
<td>in water, of water, belongs to the water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>buyakala</td>
<td>clear or fresh water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>do</td>
<td>man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eba, haye, naro</td>
<td>different types of traditional money</td>
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<tr>
<td>etamung</td>
<td>things, possession, heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ghawachu</td>
<td>twilight drum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kabam/kabang</td>
<td>big, number one, chief</td>
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<tr>
<td>kani</td>
<td>earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kebari</td>
<td>traditional money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ketombi</td>
<td>coconut branch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kose</td>
<td>sharpened roof beam sticking out at each end of the house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kosero/koselo</td>
<td>head of family or clan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maseh</td>
<td>spirit of recent death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mia</td>
<td>woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mokoubke</td>
<td>doing, done, make, making,</td>
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<tr>
<td>ondofolo/ondoporo</td>
<td>head of village and region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ondoporo kabang</td>
<td>chief, paramount chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ondoafo/ondoapi</td>
<td>government-appointed village leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peko</td>
<td>bad, no good</td>
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<tr>
<td>pulende/busende</td>
<td>belly-button</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>petere</td>
<td>break, split, splash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tambu</td>
<td>spirit, trickery, ghost</td>
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tenado  eternal man
tenanei eternal existence
tepah traditional money
uah peko mokoubeke doing something bad to the body, committing sin
uah body of a person
ufoi/upoi servant or messenger
unulu/unuru shadow of the body, spirit
warbo, warofo, uarofo guardian, provider, protective spirit
waribuna-naribuapa spirit child, supernatural boy
warido life-giving man
warinei life-giving
yauna on land or dry ground, or land, belongs to the land
yo-doo yan-doo ruler of the village, same as ondoporo
yomalo/yomaro village clothing, leadership uniform
yopa-yangpa son of ondoporo, prince
yoime daloime/ yoime ralome house of the village, public house
yowake banyan tree
yowi barramundi
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Theme of the Thesis:
An Exploratory Missiological Study of Melanesian Ancestral Heritage From an Indigenous Evangelical Perspective.

1:1 PROLOGUE

1:1:1 Thesis Statement
This is a study on the relationship between the Melanesian belief in the ancestral spirits and the belief promoted by the Gospel or Christianity. Ancestors are the core of the belief in the ancestral spirits. The core of Christianity is Jesus Christ. For centuries Melanesians lived under the influence of the ancestral spirits. Although Jesus Christ has been proclaimed in Melanesia for one hundred years, the ancestral spirits continue to dominate the lives of the people. Many Melanesians continue to see Christianity as white people's religion. The central issue addressed in this study is whether the two belief systems, one with its core in the ancestors and the other one centred in Jesus Christ, should co-exist or should one give way to the other. The following thesis will be tested:

There exists a real and helpful relationship between the Melanesian ancestral spirits and the Gospel which allows Melanesians to move from faith in the spirits of their ancestors to faith in Jesus Christ with cultural integrity and continuity.

1:1:2 Questions to be Addressed
In testing the thesis, six questions will be considered. The first question relates to the importance of understanding the power and the influence which the spirits of the ancestors have over Melanesians. Questions two and three are related to the coming of Christianity. The questions are designed to ascertain whether there were elements in Melanesian culture which helped to prepare the way for the coming of Christianity, and, whether Christianity was meaningfully and effectively related to the Melanesian culture.
In the light of the prevailing mood that views Christianity as white people's religion, and the fact that Melanesians still relate to the spirits of the ancestors, the questions help us to explore these issues more closely. Questions four, five and six are related to the attitudes of the present-day Melanesians to the belief in the ancestral spirits and Christianity. Evangelical Christians have a view-point that is different from others on the issues of ancestral spirits and Christianity. The questions to be considered are:

1. What is the significance of the belief in ancestral spirits for the lives of the Melanesian people?

2. Were there elements in the belief in ancestral spirits which prepared the people for the coming of the Gospel?

3. Was the relationship between the belief in ancestral spirits and the Gospel meaningfully related to the Melanesians?

4. How do the present-day Melanesians see the relationship between the ancestral spirits and the Gospel?

5. What is the evangelical Christian understanding of the relationship between the ancestral spirits and the Gospel?

6. How should the belief in ancestral spirits and the Gospel be related to each other?

1:1:3 Propositions Addressed in Each Chapter

Chapter two: Melanesians are a religious and rational people. As primal religionists, their belief, centred in the ancestors, is both logical and practical.

Chapter three: Meaningful and effective contextualization of the Gospel calls for careful understanding of the relationship between the beliefs in the ancestral spirits and Jesus Christ.

Chapter four: The Sentanian culture (in which the author grew up), especially its leadership structure, yields a possible way for contextualizing the Gospel in the larger Melanesian context.
Chapter five: The Priesthood of Jesus in the Epistle to the Hebrews – a case study from the Bible provides a meaningful understanding of the relationship between Jesus and the Melanesian ancestors.

Chapter six: In the interface between the introduced mission message(s) and indigenous tradition, the element in Christianity surpassing Melanesian ancestral heritage is the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus, based on the power of an ‘indestructible life’.

Chapter seven: Assesses preliminary questions raised, draws some conclusions, states areas for further study and research, and states the conclusion to the thesis.

1:2  CONTENT

1:2:1 The Influence of the Ancestral Spirits

After listening to Bernard Narokobi speaking about the coming elections, a wise, discerning old man scratched Narokobi’s toe as they were about to sleep and asked, ‘Eh, son, do we have any as?’ 1 The as, the root, denotes that the foundation of Melanesian life and the community well-being is the ancestors.

Belief in the ancestors and the practice of ancestral worship is rooted deeply in the epistemology of the people. ‘Melanesian epistemology is essentially religious. . . . Melanesians rely primarily on religious knowledge as their basis for knowing and understanding the world in which they live.’ 2 Religious ideas and practices in Melanesia are based on traditional ideas and in that sense are historical,

Ideas have histories . . . that must be situated both in individual minds and knowledge, and in political contexts. Men and women, young and old, experts and non-experts, participate in different ways in the symbolic process; they have different views of, access to, and commitments toward ‘the culture’ as the community symbolic resources. 3

According to Trompf, ‘a religious history in Melanesia is no less than the general Melanesian history itself.’ 4 Melanesian societies, like all other societies, are built on

---

1 As in Melanesian Pidgin (one of Papua New Guinea’s three national languages) means ‘the bottom, the basis, or the foundation’, see Bernard Narokobi, ‘Christianity and Melanesian Cosmos: The Broken Pearls and a Newborn Shell’, in Garry W. Trompf (ed.), The Gospel is not Western (New York: Orbis Books, 1987), 36.
'social, philosophical, religious and ideological' assumptions of the people. The classical Melanesian and the present-day Christian beliefs and practices are recognized as integral parts of the people's religious heritage. The basis for ancestral belief is further enhanced by the mythology of the people.

A myth is an expression of the sacred in words; it reports realities and events from the origin of the world that remain valid for the basis and purpose of all there is. Consequently, myth functions as a model for human activity, society, wisdom, and knowledge.

Belief in ancestral spirits reveals the Melanesian logic that the relationship experienced in this life continues after death. The ancestors are therefore seen as active participants in all areas of life, especially in important decisions which affect them and the environment owned jointly by them and the living community. Sean Dorney refers to an incident which occurred in the Morobe Province of Papua New Guinea, involving the then Premier, Mr. Utula Samana, and two opposing villages disputing over the royalty payments from a foreign timber company. A dragon lizard fell from the top of the mango tree under which they were meeting. The people scattered in all directions. When they slowly returned to the meeting place, Samana reminded them that they had forgotten to invite the animals to the meeting to tell them where they fit in, and how they were being affected by the changes in their living environment. Samana's statement settled the issue. The people knew that the dragon lizard was the embodiment of their ancestral spirits who are custodians of the environment. Success in all areas of life, the economic and political areas, the fertility of crops and animals, manufacture and use of artifacts and the well-being of the community are controlled by the ancestral spirits. Appropriate rituals and sacrifices were offered to the ancestral spirits to obtain

---


6 Narokobi uses this term instead of 'traditional' in Bernard Narokobi, *Lo Bilong Yami Yet: Law and Custom in Melanesia. Point Series No. 12* (Goroka, Papua New Guinea: Melanesian Institute, 1989). In this thesis the word 'traditional' is used.


their good will and blessings for the community. In the final analysis the belief in the ancestral spirits made the people rely 'on spirit powers or non-human agents to bring material blessing and avert pain, loss or harm.'

1:2:2 The Influence of Christianity

Pacific Island missionaries, together with missionaries from Europe, brought Christianity to Melanesia. Fijians, Samoans and Rarotongans were among the first Pacific Islanders to respond to the challenge of the dark island of New Guinea. In 1875, at the direction of the General Conference of the Australian Wesleyan Methodist Mission, George Brown visited a Fijian Bible School at Navulou and challenged the 83 students with the need of the heathens of East New Britain. Having been told to think about the challenge through the night, the next morning Aminio responded on behalf of his fellow students, saying to the British Administrator Edgar Layard who tried hard to make them change their minds:

Sir, we have fully considered this matter in our hearts; no one has pressed us in any way, we have given ourselves up to God's work, and our mind today, sir, is to go with Mr. Brown. If we die, we die; if we live we live.

Unbeknown to the Fijians, further to the east, God was preparing other Pacific Islanders, the Rarotongans, with a similar burden to reach out to the Papuans. Maretu, a leading church leader, summed up the attitude of the Pacific Churches:

Since we have heard of the heathen in Papua many have expressed their desire to be sent as servants of God to teach them a way of life, and not only to the people of Papua, but to those in Tuanaki and indeed to all now in heathen darkness.

While Brown spearheaded the Australian Wesleyan Methodist Mission in East New Britain, utilizing the services of the Fijian pastor-teachers, James Chalmers headed up the work of the London Missionary Society on the Papuan coast using the services of the Rarotongans.


12 Christianity is often branded as white-people's religion, with no due consideration to the fact that many of the early missionaries to Papua New Guinea were Pacific Islanders.

13 John Garrett, To Live Among the Stars: Christian Origins in Oceania (Geneva and Suva: World Council of Churches, in association with the Institute of the South Pacific, the University of the South Pacific, 1982), 222.

The Pacific Islanders, and the European missionaries who came with them, met great opposition from the people. On 8 April 1875, at the instigation of a powerful trading chief, Talili of the Gazelle Peninsula in East New Britain, the Rev. Sailasa Naucukidi of Fiji and three other Fijians, Livai Naboro, Timoci Barave and Peni Luvu, were brutally murdered and eaten.15 On the south coast of Papua, members of the London Missionary Society mission suffered similar fate. On Easter Sunday, 7 April 1901, Chalmers, Tomkins and nine Kiwai students from Chalmers' school at Daru, and two others were all killed on Goaribari Island by Goaribari people and eaten.16

The London Missionary Society work was established on the Papuan Coast by William Lawes, James Chalmers, and Samuel McFarlane using the services of Loyalty Islanders, Rarotongans and Nuieans initially. Before 1888, within 17 years, over 90 Pacific Islanders died in Papua New Guinea serving with the London Missionary Society.17 God has honoured the death of His servants. Today every village in Papua New Guinea is prominently marked by a church building,18 an eternal testimony to the conquering power of the Gospel.

The Gospel had triumphed and yielded an abundance of fruit. Melanesians have accepted Christianity as their way of life. Father Kingsley Gegayo, the first national secretary of the Melanesian Council of Churches is reported to have said,

if anyone came here and spoke against Christianity everyone would fight to protect it. They believe it is the seat of survival. . . . It becomes something they value very highly. They take it as the most necessary part of their community and survival. It is not like the government. It doesn't come and punish and order. [T]he church is something that belongs to them. And it doesn't hurt them – it gives them a sense of protection. . . . If someone tries to take the land away from the church they would get very angry. That is [t]he physical value of the church: sacred land to them.19

1:2:3 Ancestral Heritage and Christianity: The Two Pillars of the Nation

The National Constitution of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea has fully recognized the value of the Melanesian noble traditions enshrined in the ancestral heritage and principles of Christianity as follows:

15 Garrett, To Live Among the Stars, 224-225.
16 Ibid., 218.
17 Hitchen, Our South Pacific Missionary Heritage, 14.
18 Joshua Kurung Daimoi, 'Nominalism in Papua New Guinea', A Thesis presented to the Faculty of the School of World Mission and Institute of Church Growth, Fuller Theological Seminary in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Theology in Missiology (Pasadena, California: Fuller School of World Mission, 1985), 1.
19 John Barker, 'Mission Station and Village: Religious Practice and Representations in Maisin
We the people of Papua New Guinea, united in one nation, pay homage to the memory of our ancestors — the source of our strength and the origin of our combined heritage; acknowledge the worthy customs and traditional wisdom of our people — which have come down to us from generation to generation, pledge ourselves to guard and pass on to those who come after us our noble traditions and the Christian principles that are ours now.  

The preamble of the constitution reflects the influence the ancestral traditions and Christianity continue to have on the lives of the people. Referring to the two key phrases 'our noble traditions' and 'the Christian principles', Narokobi, one of the architects of the national constitution, states the vision of the founding fathers thus:  

the dream was that we would build our society on two fundamental pillars: one . . . that the good values of our people would be the bedrock as they move to a new economic, social, and political order; and second, that Christian principles in our community, particularly the virtues of love, and that the hope of a better future through the intervention of God in Christ, would be the bases from which we can build our new society.  

For the dream to take flesh and blood, creative confrontational dialogue is required between ‘our noble traditions’ and ‘the Christian principles’ to establish meaningful and enduring relationship between the two philosophies. Rufus Pech’s two questions in relation to the twin pillars and the ensuing statement merit serious consideration. ‘Are these “two pillars equal in size?” Have they been cut from the same tree and the same forest?’  

So before they can be brought into juxtaposition as pillars that bear the roofbeam and raise the whole roof under which the household of God in this young nation is to be brought together, there must be a measure of confrontation and continuing dialogue between them. Creative confrontation between them presupposes adequate knowledge: knowledge of self and knowledge of the other. In spiritual terms this means knowledge of the Christian faith and life, and knowledge of the indigenous religious life-system.  

The similarities and the differences between the two philosophies which call for closer examination of both are discussed in chapter six. From the Christian perspective what is incompatible with biblical teaching has to be put away once-and-for-all. Conversely,  

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24 Ibid., 12.
what was put away due to lack of understanding in the early days of missionization may need to be reintroduced with care and sensitivity. Traditional dances, tunes and art forms are some of the many examples.24

The need to build on the good values of the Melanesian classical tradition and the truth found in Christianity is acknowledged by all the Pacific Islands nations. Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, leader of the 14 May 1987 military coup in Fiji, in a speech delivered to the nation of Fiji, publicly acknowledged the contribution made by the chiefs who welcomed Christianity to Fiji. Rabuka linked the blessings the Fijians experienced to the good work done by their ancestors and Christianity, as stated below:

When first God’s religion came to our land the chiefs of that time were strong and they were strong and successful in war then. God decreed that those true chiefs of the land of that time should convert to Christianity. These true chiefs welcomed the religion then, and it was fortunate that they did, we nowadays have received its blessings. We are enlightened thereby, our land was developed thereby and we have learned much nowadays. If we approve of and welcome this, let us welcome the fact that these chiefs were the source of our blessedness. Their descendants who are leading nowadays, they are blessed because their ancestors who have passed on before them welcomed Christianity.25

This statement has to be read and analysed in the historical context of the event surrounding it. Martha Kaplan’s analytical review in the light of the political, religious, economic, and racial considerations surrounding the coup gives significant insight into the underlying motives for the statement.26 So far as this thesis is concerned, far from endorsing racial or nationalistic overtones, it simply seeks to point out the important role the ancestors and Christianity have in the life of the nation, be it Fiji or some other Pacific nation.

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24 Latukefu has discussed some of these concerns in a well-argued paper, Sione Latukefu, ‘National Traditions and Christian Principles as National Ideology in Papua New Guinea: Do Their Philosophies Complement or Contradict Each Other?’ Pacific Studies 11:2 (1988): 83-96. The relationship between Christianity and culture has been discussed in comprehensive ways by a number of scholars such as Barker (ed.), Christianity in Oceania (1990); Trompf (ed.), Not Western; Norman C. Habel (ed.), Powers, Plumes and Piglets (South Australia: Australian Association for the Study of Religions, 1979); James Knight (ed.), Christ in Melanesia: Exploring Theological Issues (Goroka, Papua New Guinea: Melanesian Institute, 1977); Alan R. Tippett, Solomon Islands Christianity: Study in Church Growth and Obstruction (New York: Friendship Press, 1967).


26 Ibid., 141-144.
Ancestral Heritage and Christianity in Relation to the Life of the Community

Melanesians see their community as one holistic entity, where a wholesome interaction takes place in the political, social, religious, and economic areas of life. The key to this interrelationship in life is the ancestors. The ancestors control human productivity,\(^{27}\) the socio-economic life of the community, the creation and the preservation of the cosmos the people belong to.\(^{28}\) The people would not leave their settlement places for a new location without the approval and the blessing of their ancestors.\(^{29}\) Lacey has recorded a prayer from the research carried out by John Waiko in 1971 among the Binandare people in the Oro Province of Papua New Guinea in which the elders of the people spoke to their ancestral spirits asking them not to be angry with them for leaving them without farewell ceremonies. They asked the ancestors to care for their land, their bananas, betelnut, their hunting ground, and their ancestral dwelling places.\(^{30}\)

Christianity is also concerned with the well-being of the community. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, which will receive a great deal of attention in this thesis, Jesus is put in charge of the household of God as the steward or the Lord of the house (Heb 3:6). Hebrews 3:6 is part of the prologue of the epistle in which Jesus is presented as God’s first-born Son (Heb 1:6); as the Sovereign God (Heb 1:8); as the Creator of all things (Heb 1:10); as the Victorious Lord (Heb 2:14-15); as the faithful High Priest (Heb 2:17; 4:14-16). Jesus and therefore Christian discipleship are proclaimed as more than able to meet the need of the community.

1:3 PERSPECTIVE

I enter into this study from three interrelated perspectives. Firstly, I approach it from an interpretative missiological perspective. Secondly, I approach it from an indigenous Melanesian perspective. Thirdly, I approach this study as an indigenous evangelical.

1:3:1 Missiological Perspective

Missiology belongs to a multi-disciplinary area of study.\(^{31}\) Tippett defines missiology as ‘the academic discipline or science which researches, records, and applies data relating


\(^{29}\) Roderic Lacey, ‘Religious Change in Precolonial Era: Some Perspectives on Movements and Change in Religious Life During Precolonial Era’, *Point* No. 2 (1978): 184-188.


to the biblical origin, the history . . . the anthropological principles and techniques and the theological base of the Christian mission. This is to state matters in more anthropological terms. More theologically defined, 'missiology is the study of individuals being brought to God in history'.

The missiological perspective of this study covers three interrelated areas: anthropology, theology, and history.

The anthropological perspective of missiology deals with the cultural context of a given group of people to which Christian messages are being introduced. So far as this thesis is concerned, the focus is on the cultural context of the Melanesian people of the Oceania region of the world. The cultural context of the Melanesians discussed in this thesis relates to the beliefs of the Melanesians, and the practice of those beliefs as the peoples' way of life. The controlling factor in the Melanesian way of life, generally conceived, is the ancestors. The Melanesian way of life is determined by the beliefs and practices established by the ancestors, which, through the generations had become the Lo of any community. The ancestral Lo is a missiological issue for the communication of the Gospel. For the Gospel to be rooted firmly and bear fruit in the Melanesian cultural context, it needs to be carefully related to the Melanesian ancestors and the Lo they had established. Tippett offers two reasons for treating missiological issues with anthropological insights: 1. It is 'anthropological because it [the Gospel] has to be communicated within the structure and organization of human societies.' 2. 'It is anthropological because this takes place in an earthly environment on which humans depend for their physical life, and where these spiritual experiences have to be worked out in a series of human relationships that are culturally conditioned.' Chapters two and four of this thesis are anthropological studies - a general study and a specific example, respectively. Since these two chapters deal with the belief and the practice of indigenous belief content of the two chapters are also theological in nature.

The theological perspective of missiological study is determined by presuppositions about God’s intervention in human societies. Thus, in the anthropological perspective, the spotlight is beamed on the human ancestors, though in the Christian theological perspective found in most missiological studies, the spotlight is

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Tippett, *Introduction to Missiology*, xiii. Note the component parts listed with the definition, which Tippett says should go together with the definition.


centred on the person and work of Jesus. The theological perspective of this study is introduced in chapter three, and discussed in some detail in chapter five, with its primary focus on the Priesthood of Jesus. Jesus the Priest is the incarnated Son of God (Heb 1:2). The incarnation of Jesus is an excellent example of contextual communication, which is important for relating the Gospel to the Melanesian situation.

The historical perspective directs our attention to God's active intervention in human affairs. History is His story. God's story covers creation, preservation, redemption and restoration. God is the beginning of history, 'In the beginning God' (Gen 1:2), and the end of it, 'come, Lord Jesus' (Rev 22:20). The Creator and the Consummator of history is the Sustainer of all things. Jesus, as the Son of God, sustains all things by 'His powerful word' (Heb 1:2). The sustaining power of God speaks of God's active involvement in the history of the world, moving everything to its final destiny, when the Son of God will roll up the existing order of things and change them, like a person changing his or her old garment for a new one (Heb 1:12). The Creator and Redeemer of all things has not left this universe to run its own course, but is actively at work sustaining what He created and redeemed.

On the basis of the biblical truth stated here, Melanesians can trust Jesus to control and sustain their lives and safely lead them to His final destination for their lives. What the Melanesians expected their ancestors to do for them has found its ultimate fulfilment in Jesus the Son of God. Melanesians can therefore with integrity honour and remember their ancestors for who they were and what they did, but they must look to Jesus, and place their faith in Him alone throughout their lives.

1:3:2 An Indigenous Perspective

As an indigene of Melanesia, I bring a Melanesian and a Christian perspective to this study. The Melanesian and the Christian perspectives are presented in general and specific ways in this thesis. Thus, chapters two and four provide general and specific discussions on Melanesian beliefs about the ancestors, chapters three and five contain general and specific discussions on Christianity.

The Melanesian perspective I bring to this study comes out of my personal identity as a Melanesian. I belong to the Melanesian ethnic race, the inhabitants of the Melanesian islands of the Oceania region of the world, comprizing West Papua, Papua New Guinea (East Papua?), Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, and Fiji. Melanesians share many things in common with those who belong to the other two
Oceanic ethnic races – the Polynesians and the Micronesians. One common point of unity these Oceanic people have with each other is that, traditionally, they have a primal religionist orientation-of-belief system. Another point of their commonality is that they were among the last people groups to be evangelized. This thesis bears the imprint of these two commonly shared points of identity. As primal religionists, we hold deep respect for our ancestors. Apart from our ancestors, we also believe in the existence of other spirit forces who influence our lives for good or ill. As the last people groups to be evangelized, we struggle to understand how Christianity relates, or can be meaningfully related, to our primal belief. More specifically, how does Christianity relate to our ancestors who have such a strong influence on our lives?

Readers are advised to keep these two perspectives in mind when reading through this thesis. Although I have written this thesis as a Melanesian for Melanesians, I trust that our Polynesian and Micronesian people, with whom we share some common heritage, will find the thesis helpful.

So far, I have spoken of the wider context of my identity. My more specific point of identification is that I have my roots among the Sentanians, who live along the edges of Lake Sentani situated some 30 kilometres south-west of Jayapura, the capital of West Papua, the most eastern province of Indonesia. Being an indigene of Melanesia, I approach this study as an insider. I have therefore devoted chapter four of this thesis to my Sentanian culture. The content of this chapter influenced and shaped my life as I grew up in my village Sosirih on the western end of Lake Sentani. At my birth, I was named Kurung after my grandfather. The name Kurung identified me with my primal religion and ancestral background. In a primal society, when I inherited my grandfather’s name I became intimately one with him, our lives merged together. My grandfather represents my history, my belief, and my future inheritance. My grandfather is my guardian throughout my life. As long as I do my best to honour and care for him, he, through his spirit, will protect me and provide for me. Through the concept of reciprocity, we became intractably bound to each other. In conferring my grandfather’s name on me, my parents brought me into a covenant relationship with him, an ongoing relationship which Jon Davies calls ‘a covenant of mutual relationship between the living and the dead’.35 Concerning this covenant relationship Davies writes,

This covenant with the ancestors is the covenant which, beyond all others, makes sense of, makes moral, and validates all the lesser covenants and contracts within which our communal life is enmeshed. Religion, for example, is never communally experienced as ‘theology’, but as the record of a religious historical journey, expressed in the lives of men and women no longer with us in the flesh, but speaking to us in handed-down and handed-on hymns, ceremonies, buildings. These hymns, ceremonies, and buildings endlessly, insistently, and helpfully present to the living the authoritative transcendental ideas and example of the dead. Cities may seem busy, but the busy life goes on in streets named after the ancestral dead, and around monuments, giving us vital uses of and for the example of the dead.36

Within the Sentanian ancestral structure, my own family is of royal, or chiefly, descent. In the Sentani culture, our first forefather was one of the paramount chiefs. Since the Sentanian community is patrilineal in nature, the first-born son in the family is the automatic heir of the family position and heritage. Regardless of who controls our nation, my birthright is mine to control and administer on behalf of my family and my community.37 As part of my ancestral heritage, I have the right to have two bird of paradise feathers on my head at important cultural functions, one slightly higher than the other. In addition, my house will have two koses projecting out from the roof-beam, one at each end of my house. The two bird of paradise feathers and the two koses are symbols of royalty. The head of my canoe will be decorated with a bird of paradise and a crocodile (Daimoi’s totem) carved on it. Apart from my ancestral name Kurung, I inherited our family or clan name, Daimoi. This name identifies us with our original forefather, who was probably called, Daime or Raimoi. Thus, my clan name takes me deep into the very root of my being. Although I had no personal involvement in the belief and practices of the primal faith, I learned a lot about it from listening to and observing what my parents and my people did. The influence of the Dutch Reformed Church did not stop our people from practising their primal religious belief. Our people practised the primal religionist faith as part of honouring and maintaining relationship with our ancestors. The primal religionist way of life was the culture in which I was reared. The words of Lloyd Warner quoted by Davies sums up the reality and the meaning of primal cultural practices;

Human culture is a symbolic organization of the remembered experiences of the dead past as newly felt and understood by the living members of the collectivity.

36 Ibid., 13.
The human condition of the individual mortality and the comparative immortality of our species make most of our communication and collective activities in the larger sense a vast exchange of understanding between the living and the dead. Language, religion, art, science, morality and our knowledge of ourselves and the world around us, being parts of our culture, are meaningful symbol systems which the living generation has inherited from those now gone. Communication between living and dead individuals maintains continuity of culture for the species.\footnote{W. Lloyd Warner, The Living and the Dead: A Study of the Symbolic Life of Americans (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 4-5; cited in Davies, Ritual and Remembrance, 12. See also, Esa Tuza, ‘Spirits and Powers in Melanesia’, in Habel (ed.), Powers, 97-108.}

As an insider, I also bring a Christian perspective to this study. At my infant baptism in the Dutch Reformed Church I was named Joshua, the name my parents selected. This was the beginning of Christian influence in my life. I became a Christian in 1962 at the Boroko Baptist church in Port Moresby. When I became a Christian I thought I no longer had to worry about my culture. In 1974 I attended the Billy Graham Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland. This consultation made me see culture as the bridge for communicating the Gospel effectively. My postgraduate studies at Fuller School of World Mission of the Fuller Theological School in Pasadena, California, in 1982, strengthened the understanding I had about culture. Instead of throwing away, or retaining, everything in our culture, we should keep what is useful and throw away what is harmful. All human culture needs to be judged in the light of the Bible, and in relation to Jesus Christ. In this thesis, I have argued that Melanesians can maintain their faith in Jesus Christ with cultural integrity and continuity. As a Christian Melanesian, I need to decide how Jesus Christ fits into my culture and into my relationship with my ancestors. How do I live as a Christian, and, more specifically as an evangelical, in relation to my ancestors and Jesus Christ in Papua New Guinea, a country that calls itself a ‘Christian’ nation, or in Melanesia in a generally post-Christian world?

1:3:3 An Indigenous Evangelical Perspective

Lastly, I bring an evangelical perspective to this study in relation to God, Jesus Christ, the Bible, and culture.

Firstly, I bring an evangelical perspective of God to this study. Evangelicals view God as a sovereign, seeking, saving and sustaining God. I see His sovereignty in the world around as the powerful creator God. In creation, I see order, design and
beauty, indicative of a creative mind responsible for what I encounter around me, above and beneath. I join my forefathers, who in their moments of extremity called out to this Person, whom they knew in different areas as Anatu, Ogla Nuknuk, Yakili, Asisi, Datagaliwabe. They called out to this Person because their ancestors and their magical skills and knowledge failed them. They knew of the existence of Someone greater and more powerful than their ancestors. They heard His voice in the thunder, they saw Him in the lightning flashing from one end of the sky to the other. My ancestors saw His answer in stopping the rain, or providing them with rain to water the earth so that their gardens would grow and give them food to eat, or answering them by taking the epidemic away so that life and health would resume their normal course of affairs. I join my ancestors in acknowledging that Someone rather than something is responsible for the environment in which I exist. This Someone, whatever name I give to Him, in whatever language I call out to Him, must be a living Person, a powerful Person; for only a living Person, greater and mightier than my ancestors, and the power of the magic and sorcery they passed down to us, can do something out of this world. Since my ancestors in their extremity called out to Him because their ancestors were not able to help them, it is sheer foolishness on my part to call on my ancestors to protect and to provide for me. In his study of a Simbu pig-killing ceremony, in the Simbu Province of Papua New Guinea, Mantovani learned that when the Simbu offered the blood of a pig to their ancestors they did so not because the ancestors are the centre of their lives, but because they and the community are dependent on something from outside themselves represented by the blood of the pig.\(^{39}\) As a Christian Melanesian, I affirm this part of my ancestral heritage, which provides for believing in a great being, for I see it as being compatible with the biblical injunction, ‘in the beginning God’ (Gen 1:1).

By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him (Heb 11:3, 6).

Paul Hiebert, Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tienou, in writing about God’s involvement in human affairs say, ‘A theology of the invisible must take seriously a trinitarian understanding of God who is continually involved in His creation by His providence, presence, and power.’\(^{40}\)

\(^{39}\) Mantovani, ‘Fundamental Melanesian Religion’, in Knight (ed.), Christ in Melanesia, 156.

\(^{40}\) Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, Tite Tienou, Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to
To look to this God, rather than turning to my ancestors to meet my needs, in no way diminishes the honour and respect I have for them, for who they were and what they did. Whatever Melanesian or Pacific theology we develop,\textsuperscript{41} whether we call it ‘coconut’ or ‘kava’ theology,\textsuperscript{42} if it fails to account for the place we give to our ancestors in our lives, grounded on strong interrelationship between biblical, theological and cultural understanding and appreciation, it will fail to sustain our people in their hour of extremity.\textsuperscript{43}

I also bring an \textit{evangelical perspective of Jesus Christ} to this study. While affirming God’s revelation in creation and in His providential care for all the people, I do not believe that these acts of God answer the most basic human need for personal relationship with the sovereign God. If this God can meet my deep need where my ancestors failed, as indicated above, then I need to enter into a personal relationship with Him. Jesus, for me, is God’s provision for this personal relationship with Him. Since my Melanesian ancestral heritage says nothing about Jesus Christ, I need to find a bridge in my Melanesian culture, which will bring me into that personal relationship with Him, and the God He came to reveal. In this thesis, I have argued that the Melanesian cultural bridge for understanding Jesus is the ancestors. The test for this statement rests with the question of whether Jesus is able to do all that the Melanesian ancestors were meant to do. Chapter six of this thesis explores this possibility on the basis of the discussions offered in chapters two to five.

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Popular Beliefs and Practices} (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1999), 371.
\textsuperscript{42} I disagree with the statements, ‘Theology is a gift from God. It is God’s revelation to history and culture.’ Stone ‘Amanaki Havae’, ‘Christianity in the South Pacific Context’, \textit{South Pacific Theology}, Papers from the Consultation on Pacific Theology, Papua New Guinea, (World Vision International, South Pacific: Regnum Books, January 1986), 14. Theology is not a gift from God, but the Gospel is. Theology is the product of human heart and mind born out of a given perspective of understanding and culture. Theology is not God’s revelation to history, but the Gospel is. If God had revealed theology, then there would be no need for Pacific or other theologies, because all of us would have the one theology to spread to every region of the world. The truth is there exist many theologies in the world today. An American theology, which portrays an American understanding of the Gospel, may not be a Pacific theology, or be acceptable in the Pacific. However, Americans or Asians have the right to interpret the Gospel for their own people, as the Pacific Islanders have to do for theirs. God has revealed the Gospel in Jesus. How we interpret and make Jesus relevant to the people in the South Pacific is theology.
\textsuperscript{43} For ‘coconut’ and ‘kava’ theology see \textit{South Pacific Theology}, 13-15.
Evangelicals believe that Jesus Christ, being Himself the only God-man, is the only mediator between God and human beings; that salvation is to be found in Jesus only, on the basis of His death as the only ransom for human sins. Evangelicals are cautious about the notion that Jesus speaks equally through all religions and ideologies. To proclaim Jesus as ‘the Saviour of the world’, for evangelicals, does not mean that all the people are automatically or ultimately saved.\textsuperscript{44} Salvation, for evangelicals, is entering into a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ by faith in Him. Other parts of the Lausanne Covenant, though, clearly indicate that evangelicals are committed to learning about other religions and ideologies in order to find meaningful ways to communicate Christ in these cultural contexts.\textsuperscript{45}

The debate about a three-part typology: pluralist, inclusivist, and exclusivist (or restrictivist) in relation to evangelicals’ attitudes to other religions and ideologies is bigger than the confines of this thesis can accommodate.\textsuperscript{46} To the above three-part typology, Van Engen has included a fourth crucial dimension for evangelicals, an evangelistic, or ‘Jesus is Lord.’\textsuperscript{47} Lesslie Newbigin has clearly pointed out the way for approaching other religions with the uniqueness of Jesus Christ:

The Christian goes to meet his neighbour of another religion on the basis of commitment to Jesus Christ. There is no dichotomy between ‘confession’ and ‘truth-seeking.’ His confession is the starting-point [for] truth seeking. He meets his partner with the expectation and hope of hearing more of truth. . . Confessing Christ-incarnate, crucified and risen – as the true light and the true life, [t]he Christian cannot accept any other alleged authority as having right of way over this.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{44} J. D. Douglas (ed.), \textit{Let the Earth Hear His Voice} (Minneapolis, Minnesota: World Wide Publication, 1975), 3-4.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 4-5.


\textsuperscript{47} Van Engen, \textit{Mission on the Way}, 176. See Ibid., n. 16 for his comments.

The early European missionaries to the South Pacific adopted this approach, as they sought to understand the Pacific Islanders, with their belief in their ancestors. This is the approach I have adopted in this thesis, especially in chapters four and five. This is a better way for approaching our understanding of Melanesian ancestral heritage, rather than simply blaming Christianity or colonialism for the changes which have occurred in Melanesian culture, or saying that Christ is a Melanesian, or that we need a Pacific Christ to make Christianity relevant to Pacific Islanders, without carefully working through the cultural, biblical, theological and missiological issues involved.

Further to the above, I bring an evangelical perspective of the Bible which flows out of my belief in, and my relationship with, Jesus. Jesus accepted the authority and truthfulness of the Old Testament as God’s definitive Word for His life and ministry. As a believer in Jesus, I affirm the authority and truthfulness of the Old Testament as God’s Word. The New Testament gives witness to the authority and truthfulness of Jesus Christ (Jn 20:21; 1 Jn 1:1-9; Lk 1:1-3; Acts 1:1; 4:12). The genealogical statements given in Matthew and Luke bear witness to the uniqueness of Jesus (Mt 1:1-17; Lk 3:23-38). Other New Testament passages also testify to the uniqueness of Jesus (1 Tim 1:15; 2:5; 3:16; Heb 1:1; Jas 1:1; 1 Pet 1:1; 2 Pet 1:1; Jude 1:1; Rev 1:1-3). The teaching of the entire Bible is the authority and standard for the Christian ministry, and for the growth and development of the believer’s personal relationship with Jesus Christ (Josh 1:7-9; 2 Tim 3:16-17; Heb 4:12-13). Melanesians see the Bible as their guiding star for life. The Bible is the reference book in missiological study, as Tippett confirms,

In missiology we find our frame of reference in the Bible. We accept this book as it is, as a tool for classifying and evaluating our material. This material comes from historical and archival sources and anthropological research, collected by the approved techniques of history and anthropology and placed on the biblical grid for interpretation.

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51 Joe Gaqaurae, ‘Indigenization as Incarnation – The Concept of Melanesian Christ’, in Knight (ed.), Christ in Melanesia, 149; and in May (ed.), A Reader, 212.
52 The first governor-general of Papua New Guinea, the late Sir John Guise, issued this challenge at the opening of the 3rd Assembly of the Pacific Churches Conference, in January at the Campus of the University of Papua New Guinea University in Port Moresby in 1976, in Havea, ‘Introduction’, South Pacific Theology, 7.
Evangelicals believe God has communicated His mind and will to those who wrote the Old and the New Testaments (2 Tim 3:16; Heb 1:1-2; 2 Pet 1:20-21). In relation to this God-human communication of the eternal and culture-bound truth of God’s Word, David J. Price writes pertinently for cross-cultural conditions.

The Bible is the revelation of the supracultural God through which He addressed culturally enclosed man [sic]. The Biblical writers used words and ideas of their own culture. Yet the same Spirit uniquely inspired each writer using the knowledge, personal experience and background of each one in the communication of His Word through human words. In the Old Testament God’s revelation came in terms of Hebrew culture, the people responding in ways appropriate to their culture, yet at the same time experiencing the transformation of their very culture itself. The New Testament in a similar way reflects the Palestinian and Greco-Roman cultural settings and the transforming nature of God’s revelation of Himself to individuals in these cultural contexts. The progressive revelation of God in history was not only the unfolding of God’s plan for man [sic] through the ages, but also a revelation given through diverse cultures making possible a more comprehensive display of truth than that possible within a single culture. The fact that God in Scripture clearly takes man’s [sic] culture so seriously, indicates that today He desires the many cultures of mankind to express the supracultural truth of His revelation in the Scriptures in ways that are meaningful in those cultures.55

Finally, I bring an evangelical perspective of culture to this study. Culture is the way of life of a given group of people, the product of human heart and mind, the belief system of the people, adequate to meet their basic needs. As an evangelical, my view of culture is strongly influenced by my view of God, Jesus Christ, and the Bible. God is not responsible for human culture because culture is the product of the human heart and mind. However, God uses what is good and wholesome in every culture to achieve His purposes. The incarnation is God’s supreme demonstration of His unconditional identification with human culture. Jesus took human culture seriously when He became a human being. The Bible condemns what is evil and demonic in every culture, but affirms what is good and wholesome for the good of the people, and for the fulfilment of God’s purposes. Evangelicals strongly advocate the need for seeing and evaluating human culture through the eyes of the Bible, and to see the Bible through the eyes of human culture. When the Bible is studied through the eyes of culture, new insight and truth will be discovered, which will bring fresh understanding and enrichment to the

international Christian community. Evangelicals are committed to this culture-oriented biblical understanding.

The message of the Bible is addressed to all mankind. For God’s revelation in Christ and in Scripture is unchangeable. Through it the Holy Spirit still speaks today. He illumines the minds of God’s people in every culture to perceive its truth freshly through their own eyes and thus discloses to the whole church evermore of the many-coloured wisdom of God.

Culture-bound Scriptural interpretation according to Hiebert, Shaw, and Tienou will result ‘in a meta-theology – a biblically-based way of doing theology that sets limits to theological diversity’. Some of the principles for doing biblically-based meta-theology are: 1. ‘[T]he acceptance of Scripture as divine revelation. The Bible is not a record of human searching for God, but of God revealing Himself to them in the particular contexts of history, culture and society.’ 2. Interpret the Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. 3. Openness to let the church as a community check the theology or the interpretation of Scripture. 4. Allow the church to ‘test its old ways in the light of the new’. In summarizing the discussion on the above points, these three scholars write,

After critically evaluating their old ways, people, led by their pastors need to create new beliefs and practices that are both Christian and native. They are no longer pagans, but they should not imitate Western Christians. This process of critical contextualization takes the Bible as the rule of faith and life seriously. It recognizes the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of all believers open to God’s leading. It also strengthens the church by making it a hermeneutical community in which everyone seeks to understand God’s message to His people in the context of their everyday lives.

1:4 SOURCES USED

The sources used in this study have come from written, oral, and personal knowledge and understanding.

57 Douglas, Let the Earth Hear His Voice, 1975, 3, paragraph 2.
58 Hiebert, Shaw, and Tienou, Understanding Folk Religion, 384.
59 Ibid., 384-387.
60 Ibid., 387.
1:4:1 Written Sources
The South Pacific or the Oceania region of the world continues to be a rich mining site for academics of all persuasions, as well as journalists, explorers, religious and government personnel; all seeking to put into writing whatever interests them. With reference to the theme of this study, I have been influenced by many writers, but have footnoted those influences as fully as possible, and included sources referred to in the bibliography. In the South Pacific area, where changes are a daily occurrence, what is written today will be outdated tomorrow. This means there is always something worth writing about. This study is indicative of the many areas of concern in the South Pacific needing research and writing. Where appropriate, written sources from other areas of the world have been used, and have been acknowledged accordingly.

The sources for the biblical input for this study have come from many scholarly journals, books, and commentaries. These have been appropriately acknowledged in the footnotes and in the bibliography. Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical quotations have been taken from the 1978 New International Version of the Bible, produced by the New York International Bible Society.

1:4:2 Oral Sources
I am grateful to the many people, both missionaries and Melanesians, who have provided me with verbal or written oral information. They include Duli Asi, Ogla Makindi, George Euling, Kay Liddle, Alan and Valerie Sinclair, and Neville Robert Bartle. Some of the oral information has come from my own Sentani people, and among them I name Henk and Hermina Joku (husband and wife), Franz Albert Joku, Dr. Ambrose Suebu, Alfreda Fuapla, Pilipus Daimoi, Nicolas Nere, and Jacob Dike.

1:4:3 Personal Knowledge
Apart from drawing on the material collected by Kamma around the middle and the eastern parts of Lake Sentani, the rest of the material in chapter four dealing with the Sentani culture is drawn from my own knowledge and understanding of my people, and the verbal information I received from fellow Sentanians, especially from those just listed.

Like all Melanesians, I grew up in a spirit-dominated environment. The village cemetery was for us the main centre of our spirituality. Most of the graves at the village
cemetery had little houses built over them for the spirit of the dead to come out from the grave and relax there during the day or at night. In the 1950s, at Christmas time, mothers and children would go to the cemetery, sweep over and around the graves, and decorate them with flowers and colourful papers. At sunset, mothers and children would return to the cemetery with plates of fried banana, pots of coffee, and small lighted kerosene lamps, and place them on top of little tables built at one end of the grave for the occasion. As children, we were made to believe that, as we celebrated Christmas in the village at night, the dead would have their own celebration at the cemetery. We grew up with the consciousness that our ancestors, and others who have died, continue to live on in the form of maseh (spirit of the dead). The maseh live around the cemetery. When we went fishing, my father would cut a small young sago leaf, tie knots with some of the leaves, spit betelnut juice on to the leaves whilst speaking to the spirits to do their part. Going to the gardens, children were told to wait for an adult to remove the branches used to block the entrance to the garden, because magical words were spoken over the branches when the entrance was closed. As we grew older, we observed, listened and learned many things about the customs, beliefs, and practices of our people. The knowledge and understanding I gained from the elders continues to be a valuable resource for Melanesian ancestral heritage in my life.

1.5 TERMINOLOGIES USED

In this thesis, the term Melanesian ancestral heritage means the same thing as Melanesian traditional belief or religion. These terms are used interchangeably throughout the thesis. The term Lo in Pidgin English, one of the three national languages of Papua New Guinea, is used as an ethical and religious code of behaviour for the community, based on the teachings and laws established by the ancestors. We realize, of course, that the content of each local culture's concept of Lo is constantly changing, even disintegrating, or being modernized or Christianized under the many influences confronting every present-day Melanesian society. Nevertheless it is our contention that even with such changes Lo continues to fill these vital ethical and religious code functions in Melanesian societies. We shall, therefore, continue in our use of the concept Lo in this thesis to include the reality of ongoing change in its content in any particular society.
The term Hebrews is used for the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, or as the name for the epistle, or for the readers of the epistle. The content of the material will explain the use of the term.

1:6 THE CHOICE OF AND APPROACH TO HEBREWS

1:6:1 The Choice of Hebrews

I have chosen the Epistle to the Hebrews as the means to develop a Melanesian evangelical theology for several reasons. First and foremost, this is the one New Testament book where the ancestors and Jesus are brought into relationship with each other. The opening two verses of Hebrews chapter one immediately bring us face-to-face with the ancestors and Jesus together. As a Melanesian, I immediately ask myself whether Jesus is to be seen as an ancestor in the context of the prologue to the epistle – chapters one to four firstly, but also in the context of the rest of the epistle. The discussion in chapter five of this thesis shows that this is indeed the case.

A second, and closely-related, reason is that Hebrews is concerned not only with ancestors, but also with community, priests, sacrifices, worship, law, covenant, and will, and encouraging and caring for one another. While neither Hebrews nor any other book in the Bible was written to answer Melanesian issues, the issues mentioned in Hebrews are nonetheless Highly relevant to the concerns addressed in this thesis. Of immediate pertinence is the fact that Hebrews presents Jesus as being superior to the angels, and the Old Testament ancestors like Moses, Aaron, and Abraham. Hebrews also makes Jesus superior to all other spirits and human ancestors worshipped and honoured by the Melanesians, while at the same time attending to these beings’ preconceived importance. Another example can be seen in the fact that when Hebrews calls Jesus the first-born Son of God, and thus applies a universal human family identity to Jesus. This allows Melanesians to compare Jesus with the position and the responsibility of the first-born in their families.

Thirdly, the fact that Hebrews was written to interpret Jesus to Christians who struggled with their cultural heritage, and their standing in the eyes of the rest of their community, suggests the Melanesian ancestral heritage needs to be interpreted in the light of Jesus also. The issue to be faced here, though, is the extent to which Melanesian ancestral heritage should be rejected or retained in the light of Jesus.
1:6:2 The Approach to Hebrews

Scholars have approached Hebrews from different perspectives to determine the factors which influenced the compilation of the epistle. In recent years, scholars have taken great interest in approaching biblical studies from cultural and anthropological perspectives. Instead of determining the factors which influenced the writer of Hebrews to construct the sermon or the epistle, this thesis seeks to discover some Melanesian cultural bridges to make the message of Hebrews, centred in Jesus Christ, relevant to Melanesians, and thus adopt a form of contextualizing, culture-anthropological hermeneutics.

The first bridge or approach in this thesis is to see, hear and discern the central message of Hebrews with Melanesian eyes, ears and mind. A missionary who served for a long time in a theological seminary in Papua New Guinea writes:

Surely, Melanesians can do without a lot of erudition. On the other hand, they can often achieve a better understanding by just looking back at their own cultural heritage. Because this local background is by definition un-western, pre-technical and non-urban, it must be closer to what it has to say, because the Bible, too, is un-western, pre-technical and non-urban.61

The second bridge to approach Hebrews employed in this thesis, is by way of interpersonal understanding proposed by Anthony Thiselton.62 Thiselton displays an interpersonal understanding related to the hermeneutics of understanding formulated by Schleiermacher, Dilthey, and Betti to explain the theological and pastoral concerns in Hebrews,63 especially as they relate to the paranetic material64 (thus 2:1-4, 7-16; 4:14-16; 5:11-6:12; 10:26-39; 12:1-17; 25-39) interspersed throughout.65 In Thiselton's view, Hebrews uses this concept of interpersonal understanding to explain the eternal and the invisible in terms of the temporary, the material, and the visible to his readers. Putting it differently, grasping this concept for interrelational communication, Hebrews moves from the known to the unknown in encouraging the readers to hold on to their faith to the end. One of the four concluding points Thiselton presents is of immense importance for this thesis. This point shows that it is possible to understand Biblical

63 Ibid., 262.
64 Ibid., 262.
65 Ibid., 261-3, for discussion on interpersonal understanding.
texts and feel their impact on our lives without reconstructing or fully knowing and understanding the historical, cultural, and theological background of a Biblical book which influenced its author. Thiselton claims that,

it would be a mistake to conclude that no understanding is possible without historical reconstruction... understanding is a process rather than a single event. We may sometimes experience leaps in understanding. But this does not necessarily imply that we have no understanding before such an experience; or, that on the other hand, that subsequent understanding cannot improve further. There are degrees of understanding. This is one reason why so often readers describe the Bible as inexhaustible. The absence of historical construction may mean only that certain features of understanding may be missing, and that the constraints which prevent misunderstanding are fewer and less effective than otherwise. In the Christian community, in practice, sometimes certain historical reconstructions are simply presupposed by some who do not consciously make them. They have been mediated, second-hand, from lecture-rooms or pulpits, and contribute unconsciously to what is perceived as the natural meaning. The inference of this is not that historical interpretation should be avoided, but that what is mediated needs to be based on responsible and careful judgment.\(^{66}\)

Lindars similarly cautions against seeing literary criticism as being the only method for understanding Biblical material like the message of Hebrews. As he puts it,

modern methods of literary criticism may have some value here, but again it is necessary to strike a note of caution. Hebrews is not a narrative or a poem which has to be elucidated and appreciated, but is an appeal to particular people to revise their understanding of their Christian faith and to abandon action which is incompatible with it. Structural analysis, as practised by Ricoeur and Patte, may help to expose the dynamics of the argument, but cannot alter the actual message.\(^{67}\)

This does not take away the need for responsible and meaningful exposition of God’s Word. As Hiebert explains,

[The pastor or the missionary]... must also have a meta-cultural framework that enables him or her to translate the Biblical message into the cognitive, affective, and evaluative dimensions of another culture. This step is crucial, for if the people do not clearly grasp the Biblical message as originally intended, they will have a distorted view of the Gospel.\(^{68}\)

\(^{66}\) Ibid., 266.
The third bridge to approach Hebrews for contextualized study is via the concepts of ‘dual nationality’ and ‘an adoptive past’, proposed by Professor Andrew Walls. In discussing the concepts, Walls points out that a Christian, by virtue of his or her commitment to God through Jesus Christ, becomes a member of a new people created by Christ, with a new set of family relationships, a new kith and kin of all families and nations and tongues, to whom he owes family loyalty and whom he must accept – as God has accepted him – with their group relations on them. Every Christian, that is, has dual nationality: he belongs to his human family, based on kinship and nationality, and to the faith family, which links him to people outside his own interest group and nationality – links him to those in opposing interest groups and nationalities who share his faith. . . . Another aspect, and one less often noticed, is that he is given an adoptive past. He is linked to the people of God in all generations, who are his people; of the faith family. In particular he is linked to the history of Israel, given several thousands of years of someone else’s history – for Israel, too, was the people of God.

The fourth bridge for approaching Hebrews is through the concepts of priest, or high priest, and sacrifice. Melanesian communities have priests with different functions. No community can survive without priests and sacrifice. The discussion of these two concepts has been taken up in chapter five of this thesis, and might be said to be a culminating part of it.

1:7 THE METHODOLOGY USED
As an exploratory missiological study dealing with the relationship between ancestral heritage and Christianity, this study brings together knowledge gained from biblical, cultural, anthropological, and missiological understandings to develop a contextualized study to relate Christianity more meaningfully to Melanesians and other Pacific nations. Such a contextualized study, in my opinion, is the best approach to help Melanesians to see Christianity as a universal religion applicable for all the people of the world. Jesus Christ, as the centre of Christianity, is the answer to Melanesians’ deep longing for an ongoing relationship with their ancestors and their ancestral heritage.

The culture of a given group of people is the natural door to penetrate their hearts and minds with the truth of God. Unless we understand how the people think,

70 Ibid., 12.
what they believe, and how their societies function, our best efforts will be like loose soil crumbling down with the first drop of rain.\textsuperscript{71}

1:8 SUMMARY

By way of summary we state that for Melanesians the ancestral heritage, or the traditional belief, prepared the people for the full truth to be revealed in Jesus Christ. What Melanesians expected their ancestors to do for them has found its ultimate fulfilment in Jesus the Son of God. Melanesians can therefore with integrity honour and remember their ancestors for who they were and what they did, but they must look to Jesus, and place their faith in Him alone throughout their lives. Faith in Jesus Christ demands total reliance on Him to provide for all their needs.

CHAPTER TWO

MELANESIAN RELIGION: GENERAL.

2:1 INTRODUCTION
Religion continues to have a central place in the life of the Melanesians. Every part of Melanesian life and activity is filled with spirit consciousness. The jungles and the rivers, the earth and the sky bear witness to the power and presence of their great ancestors, whom they honour and respect greatly. Understanding the past will enable us to study and integrate Christianity in meaningful and effective ways, where possible, with the traditional practices.

This chapter takes a look at the past under three major sub-headings:

- The Basis for Religion
- The Functions of Religion
- The Need for Religion

2:2 THE BASIS FOR RELIGION
In a spirit-dominated world, religion is the centre of Melanesian life and action. In Melanesian thinking the world the people live in was created or bequeathed to them by their creator spirits or ancestors. The Ialibu tribes of the Southern Highlands, and other Southern Highlanders of Papua New Guinea believe in common, for example, that Yakili, a half-man and half-vegetation being, is the creator of the world in which they live.¹ Tudava is the creator-hero who made the Trobriand Islanders proud of their place as the home of very big yams.²

The Melanesian world bears the imprints of the power and the personality of the spiritual powers. Roderic Lacey observes two important facts about this primordial belief:

Firstly, the environment and landscape is endowed with the power and personality of the creator hero, and thus is alive and personal. Secondly, the fertility or non-fertility of the environment is rooted in relationships between specific inhabitants of particular areas and the powerful creator-spirit.¹

The marks of the ancestors, and the spirits, on the environment in which the people live make the Melanesian world religious and spiritual.

Religion is important in all Papua New Guinea societies. Allowing for regional variations, virtually all serious events are seen as in some way connected with it. Nevertheless, it is difficult to define. The people themselves have no general term for it, and it cannot be regarded, as it is in the Western world, as a separate culture entity, something pertaining to a special supernatural or transcendental realm within the cosmos. Its explanatory mythology or scripture is not different or set apart from other forms of knowledge, nor is its ritual reserved for and performed on specified occasions. It is not something removed from the ordinary world of secular human affairs: it is best examined as one aspect of the total cosmic order that the people believe to exist.⁴

![Figure 1: Ancestors controlling every part of community life.](image)

Peter Lawrence rightly points out, difficulties of defining religion, because it is part and parcel of the people’s culture and world-view. The total cosmic order the people believe to exist, and to which the Melanesians have to relate, makes their community religious experience a holistic encounter with the totality of life, or, as the total cosmic order that the people believe to exist.

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² Ibid., 205
To think holistically, for the Melanesians, means believing that being and knowing are seen as acting and interacting with each other. Indigenous philosopher Bernard Narokobi goes a stage further:

I hold that Melanesians do not differentiate religious and non-religious experience. I believe an experience, or experience in general, is a total encounter of the living person with the universe that is alive and explosive. In fact, for Melanesians there are no religious and other experiences. An experience for a Melanesian, I believe, is the person's encounter with the spirit, the economics, the politics, and life's own total whole.⁵

Experienced missiologist Ennio Mantovani sees this totality of life as \textit{theistic} – God-centred – and \textit{biocosmic} in an underlying way, for it is Life-centred. He believes that Melanesian \textit{theistic} and \textit{biocosmic} sensibilities are concerned with 'something' absolutely vital for existence, which he calls 'Life'.⁶

The more a reality participates in that 'Life', the stronger, healthier, richer, more important that reality becomes. If 'Life' ebbs away, then sickness and eventually death follows. 'Life' is more than biological life, or material existence, it is material, biological and spiritual. In a sentence: everything which is experienced as positive has its source in that 'Life', anything negative is experienced as loss of that 'Life'.⁷

If Garland has questioned Mantovani's use of \textit{biocosmism} as 'a separate form of religion';⁸ Mantovani has elaborated his approval by asserting that,

Both \textit{theism} and \textit{biocosmism} are human, limited symbolic systems based on human cultural experiences. God used both. . . . One revelation is expressed by the mythology of creation, the other by the dema-mythology. One stresses creation, the other stresses the inner 'Life'. One stresses the creator, the other the inner powerful 'Life'. One stresses the personal, the being over against the other, the other stresses the being, one with the other.⁹

Whatever their differences, Mantovani and Garland are both concerned with one important issue, the totality of life which embraces the Melanesians in their world. Both \textit{theistic} and \textit{biocosmic} views of life are concerned with the search for pragmatic meaning or abundance of life.

⁷ \textit{Ibid.}, 31-32.
Melanesians are concerned with religious question, ‘Does it work? Is it effective? Will it bring abundance of life?’ The question ‘Is it true?’, which may be very important to a Western Christian, is a cognitive entity separate from experience, and thus not an important element in Melanesian religions. . . . Melanesians are concerned with whether or not religious experience brings abundant life.10

The traditional Melanesian thinking presented in this thesis is earth-bound, or human-centred. The people look to this world to provide them with abundant or fullness of life, or gutpela sindaun. This view challenges the theocentric and biocosmic views represented by Garland and Mantovani to provide the people with answers for their immediate and ultimate needs. It seems to me that the explanation about the origin which provides abundant life needs to be tackled from two directions: 1. The theocentric view of life needs to be carefully related to the people’s everyday life. The people must see God as the origin of life, as a Person who is vitally involved in everything that concerns them. The people will quickly give up believing in the Christian God if He is left at the theological or theoretical level only. 2. The biocosmic perspective on life has to be carefully explained to the people in relation to the Christian God also. It needs to take the people from where they are with their earth-bound, human-centred, belief about life to the God of the Bible as the giver and sustainer of life.

We can consider initiation ceremonies as embodying and passing down this approach to a fulfilled life. Michael Somare encapsulates the important ties Melanesians have with their world through the initiation ceremony he experienced,

For me the installation [initiation] ceremony meant that I had again struck roots at home. Rather than remaining a floating city dweller I had been reintegrated with my clan, my family and my village. The wisdom of Sana, my grandfather, had been passed on to me together with his strength and his fighting spirit. Most important to me is the fact that Sana was a great peacemaker – the man who sat down to eat with his enemies before agreeing to fight them. He could not have passed on better wisdom to guide me in my job as Chief Minister of Papua New Guinea.11

The initiation rites amount to the re-enactment of the people’s relationship with the primordial life which forms the foundation of their world and existence, these rites of passage are an emotional and a spiritual experience, uniting the community of the living and the living-dead into one.

When young Melanesians entered the community it was a community of both the living and the dead – of men, women and ancestors. For most Melanesian societies, the ancestors or dead relatives were an integral, supportive part of the whole company of souls, so that ordinary humans were dependent on their aid, their more-than-human power and, at the very least, on their contentment. In some cases, initiation itself was a form of ritual ‘death’, the passing from one order into another . . . one through temporary contact with that spiritual realm in which ancestors move and have their being.12

But initiation also ties the living members of the community with each other. Initiation prepares the new generation for responsible living within the community they belong to. The passing over into responsible manhood is a religious, social, and economic experience. As a religious experience, the elders teach the young men magical words to communicate with the appropriate spirit beings on behalf of the individuals, or for the well-being of the living community. As a social experience, initiation provides the initiates with their education for life. Initiation is a traditional form of schooling, when the initiates learn traditional songs and tunes, are introduced into the art of self-defence through mock-up military exercises,13 and are disciplined in character development. The initiates with long hair in Maori Kiki’s view are men of good character who have learned to discipline themselves in growing long hair.14 As an economic experience, initiation prepares the new generation of both men and women to make their own gardens, build their own houses, and so on.15

What the initiates saw and heard during their initiation was typically related to their clan totems, animate and inanimate. Totemic ancestorhood, as I would call it, is a very widespread understanding, and crucial for mediating the sense of groups held together by spiritual realities, not just ‘thought truths.’ The totems are believed ‘to contain the spirit of the common ancestor’,16 but some are limited to tribal identities. The internal life of the village communities is organized according to the people’s identity with the totems. This totemic descent binds villages and communities, even if they are distant from each other. Marriages and social interaction are often traced down to such totemic ancestorhood, even if only in an indirect way.

Interrmarriage with one whose totem sign is the same would be regarded as abhorrent though the parties might belong to villages separated by long distances. A sure way of promoting a breach of the peace would be to slay a man’s totem and to carry it, whether it be wallaby, or pigeon, or fish, ostentatiously past his house. If a man was to partake of his own totem he would break out into sores and eruptions, so it was feared, and die a miserable death.\textsuperscript{17}

This totemic identity establishes kinship relationships which bind clans, tribes, and villages to each other. To take a model that applies to most Melanesian situations, when a given clan A of village S has a kinship relationship with clan B in village D, their relationship to each other allows them to move freely between the two villages even though the people of the other clans may be their traditional enemies. Through the relationship the members of clan A have with other members of their village S, it becomes a tabu for them to hurt the relatives of clan A from village D. It also works for those in village D in relation to the relatives of clan B in village S. These relationships bring strength and security to Melanesian communities.

The belief in the totemic ancestorhood extends itself to the inanimate entities as well. In New Caledonia, the yam is seen as ‘a human thing.’\textsuperscript{18} The New Caledonians identify themselves with the yam through which they gain understanding about themselves. The care and the sensitivity given to the harvesting and the handling of the yam shows the people’s association with it.

A man does not pick up a yam as he would anything; nor does he hold it with the august gravity of someone taking up a sacred object. He leans over it, searching for the strongest spot in the weak body of the long root. He slides his hand beneath the extremity called the head, to give it support and keep it from breaking off by its own weight. He holds it gently, as he would a newborn child whose head must be carefully supported to keep it from rolling back. Holding a yam carelessly is as serious as holding a baby carelessly. The careless person is dismissed and someone else takes his place, exactly as a person is replaced if he holds a child improperly.\textsuperscript{19}

This ritual of yam harvesting represents the people’s belief in their ancestors, as well as their sense of spiritual reality in the cosmos (or ‘cosmomorphism’ as Maurice Leenhardt describes it).

The yam is a human thing. Since it is born in the earth in which the ancestors are decomposed – are in a diffused state, as it were – the yam is the flesh of the

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 12.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 61.
ancestors. During the festival of the first-fruits, it is decorated like a person, with a special hat and ornaments made of shells and magic plants. As it is disrespectful to speak whilst eating a yam, it is always eaten in silence. It makes man’s flesh, strength, and virility. The first union of spouses is preceded by the ritual consumption of a yam prepared by the wife. It is an element of life given to ensure the complete recovery of sick people who come back to existence.  

The rules for harvesting yam or taro were passed down to the community by the ancestors. The community believes and follows these rules and directions because there is reality in what they see and experience. The ancestral rules are followed because the people believe they are perpetually being watched by their departed ancestors, who are believed to be present with the community, and to assert their authority on their descendants.

In Melanesia the dead may mingle with the living... Custom provides for the case of people reputedly dead who return to take their places in the village. The villages have a protocol. When the ghost makes himself known near his dwelling, they gird him with bands of bark cloth, and thus wrapped in the fibres of life, he is reintegrated into the clan and enters his home. This protocol, which is established on most of the islands, shows most clearly the native’s general uncertainty about the authenticity of the being he sees near him. This produces in him a great reserve toward travellers which may surprise or offend them.

Very often the ancestors are conceived to have a special locus of power, even if they are also highly mobile. The Baktaman of Papua New Guinea, prior to depositing the skull of a departed in a limestone cave, ‘as a potential candidate for supplementing the ancestral population in the temple’, they would call on the spirit of the departed to enter the skull. These practices are carried out with the knowledge that since the ancestors are in a spiritual state they are more powerful, and have the added advantage of knowing everything. The Kwaio of the Malaita Island in the Solomon Islands believe the adalo (the ancestral spirits) are all-seeing and all-knowing:

An adalo is everywhere ‘like the wind’ and thus can ‘see’ events simultaneously in a dozen places, receive sacrifices in two or three shrines at once, communicate with the living in different places. We refer to adalo as dead (mae). But though they ‘are dead’, it is we who are alive who make the mistakes. The adalo see the slightest small thing. Nothing is hidden from the adalo. It would be hidden from us (the living people). Even the slightest pollution. Someone urinates, and tries to hide it. We can’t see it: Only the woman who does it will know about it. But still the adalo will see it.

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20 Ibid., 62.
21 Ibid., 26-27. This practice is probably to be understood in the same way as the procedure followed by the Baktaman described in the paragraph following this quotation.
The presence of the ancestors in the community overshadows the people like the clouds over their heads. The presence of the ancestral spirits is the spiritual vitality of the community. The ancestors hold in their hands the power of fertility for gardens, pigs, and marriages, which in actuality means the ancestors hold the secret to community life and prosperity.

Not only are the villagers conscious of the importance of the departed ancestors in their lives, this belief is common among the highly-educated modern ones also. Some of these highly-educated Melanesians find it necessary to seek guidance and wisdom from ancestors before undertaking important assignments. Esau Tuza’s writing about Silas Eto of New Georgia in the West Solomon Islands, the founder of Christian Fellowship Church, who is known as ‘Holy Mama’, living in church buildings, is a further evidence of the Melanesians’ belief that they are living side-by-side with the ancestors.

The belief about the presence of the ancestors in the community is based on the fact that, in Melanesian traditional thinking, the home of the spirits is part of this world.

For the Melanesians, there is neither a skyward heaven as a reward for the good, nor an earthbound hell for the wicked. At the same time, no one ever doubts that death is not the end of life. Death is a transformation through which the living shed one cloak and put on another. Death is like a lobster or a snake that shed its old skin and put on a new one; whereby the person is reborn and lives on the same plane [sic] as all other living beings.

The idea of the spirits sharing the same space with the living is closely related to the concept of rebirth. This belief about rebirth can be well illustrated by the traditional beliefs of the Toambaita of Malaita Island in the Solomon Islands. Traditionally, the Toambaita not only believed in the existence of the ancestors, but that the ancestors, having died, actually returned as superior beings to live with the living community. For the Toambaita, this belief was related to the Maru’u sharks.

To illustrate briefly and to the point, the case of ‘Maru’u Sharks’ relates to Mui’ithau, the eighth ancestor of the Maru’u tribe. One day whilst Mui’ithau was sharpening ‘his arrows at his place, Ra’afanibulu, inland from Maru’u, he accidentally

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26 Festus Fisinao Suruma, ‘Toambaita Traditional Beliefs and Worship of Ancestral Spirits and God’s
sharpened one of his fingers which started to bleed".\textsuperscript{27} To protect himself from being poisoned by sorcerers if they found the remains of his blood, he collected it in a clam shell. In a succession of dreams at eight-day intervals his ancestors told him to keep checking his blood in the container. After the first eight days, he saw a fish-like object, the size of a finger, in the container. After the second eight days, he saw a shark almost as big as the container. At the instruction of the ancestors in a dream, he constructed a wooden bed, and after the final eight days, with the help of some men, they carried the container with the shark on the bed to Maru‘u near the coast. On arrival Mui‘ithau built an altar, sacrificed a pig, and offered prayers to initiate shark worship at Maru‘u. This first shark was named Bulagwau, the third ancestor of the Maru‘u tribe. As Mui‘ithau continued to worship the shark, eventually ‘all the other main ancestors turned into sharks’,\textsuperscript{28} and thus they are near at hand for support and social control.

So in this last case, to confirm an early point, the presence of the ancestors in the community means they are accessible in certain locations known to the community. Contemporary Solomonese Christian thinker Tuza felt forced to ask about their presence even after massive religious change in his region.

Our ancestors in the hope (ancestral shrines) are not dead. They are asleep (literally made to sleep). . . . Can our ancestors be awakened, if they really are asleep? If so, where do we see them up and about? (I suggest) that our ancestors are very much alive – in church buildings, in us and in our communities.\textsuperscript{29}

In pre-Christian days among the Roviana of the Western Solomons, the hope or sope represented the centre of the community spirituality. The hope or sope was a sacred place, the abode of the ancestors represented by the skulls it contained. The community communicated with these dignitaries through their appointed representative – the sisiama or hiama (priest). In Tuza’s view the churches have replaced the old community spirituality.

But there are other world-views in which a more nebulous spirit (or sometimes sky) world is the key to apprehending ancestral presence. The belief in the presence of the ancestors in the community for the Ialibu people of the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea is based on the myth of the first family of four. One day the mother died, but returned to be with the family the next day to care for the husband and their two

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{67} Tuza, ‘The Demolition’, 67.
infant children. She assured the family that everything would go well provided they agreed to live peacefully, free of quarrelling and anger. However, one day, the husband returned from hunting, tired and hungry. There was no food in the house, because his wife had just returned from a busy day in the garden. Being angry and impatient, the father beat up their two children. The agreement was broken! Immediately, the wife left for the spirit world, but promised to be with them. She told them to offer prayers and gifts to her spirit to care and provide for them. When they encountered problems and difficulties, they should offer prayers and gifts to her. The children should roast an animal in a little hut and call out: ‘Mother, help us’. The ancestor worship thus began in Ialibu, and set the pattern for the people to experience the closeness and the activity of the spirits among them.  

2:2:1 A Sense of Accountability

The presence of the ancestors in the community speaks of interdependence and accountability. As the living care for the dead, so the dead in turn will continue to care for the living. The ancestral Lo provides for this on-going sense of interdependence and mutual accountability. The life and reality of the departed ancestors are represented by the living ancestors or elders of the community. Traditionally, Melanesian elderhood or leadership were spiritual appointments. No one took on leadership responsibilities without undergoing the required preparations, and in some cases formal initiation ceremonics, because the elders were approaching ancestorship themselves. Initiation, especially the higher levels of it, cemented the ongoing relationship between ‘the living and the dead, spirits and nature, tradition and land.’

Prior to commencing their community responsibilities, transformation of life through learning about the ancestral Lo, and a face-to-face encounter with the ancestral spirits, are the prerequisites for acceptance and recognition of elderhood status by the community. Whether the initiation takes place in the haus tambaran (spirit house), or deep in the heart of the forest, the dark interior of the haus tambaran, the dark forest, symbolize the womb from which new life is born. Among the Wosera people of the Abalam language group of the Sepik area of Papua New Guinea, it is said:

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32 For Haus Tambaran initiation, see Schroeder, Ibid., 294-306; and Initiation and Religion: A Case Study from the Wosera of Papua New Guinea, Studia Instituti Anthropos 46 (Sankt Augustin,
the initiates are symbolically crushed or killed by the nggwaíndu (ancestral spirit), and later are reborn in the dark interior of the haus tambaran, which is referred to as the womb, in symbol, the ‘black paint’, physical sufferings, and blood-letting all pointing to the necessity of death, before there can be new life.33

At their initiation, the elders are made custodians of the provision of community power and prosperity, wholeness of life or salvation, that the departed ancestors bestowed on the community. Theologically understood, the living elders represent the bridge for the Melanesian search for salvation or self-identity.34

The authority and responsibility of the ancestors are limited to the members of their clan or village community. At death, the elders become ancestral protectors of the living members of their own community. This practice shows that the ancestors are territorially bound, and therefore have no jurisdiction over other areas.35

The community leaders, as elders, represent the authority and spirituality of the ancestral spirits. The presence of the ancestors in some communities is represented by the post of the house,36 in others by smoothly sharpened roof-beams, one extending out from each end of the house,37 among other communities, by totemic designs on the canoe head,38 or specially-designed masks.39 These representations make the community very conscious of the ever-watching eyes of the ancestral spirits. The living elder (or papa) of the family, clan, or tribe, rules over the house or the people under his care, as the personal representative of the ancestral spirits. As the guardian of the community, the papa of the family is also the guardian of the community Lo, which ensures community harmony and well-being.

The concept of Lo used in this thesis carries the same meaning as the nareng-gareng concept of the Kâte-speaking people in Huon Gulf of the Morobe Province. Numuc Zipayukic Kemung has used this concept of nareng-gareng for his doctoral dissertation as ‘A Principle for Mission in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua

Germany: Anthropos Institute, 1992). For deep forest initiation, see Maori Kiki, Ten Thousand Years, 35-54.

Schroeder, ‘Contextualization of Initiation’, 302.


This is how the houses of the Sentani community leaders are distinguished from other houses. Full discussion on this is presented in chapter 4 of this thesis.

Somare, Sana, 36.

New Guinea’. As Kemung explains it, nareng-gareng, among other things conveys such meanings as: ‘exchange of somebody or something, trade, mutual giving and receiving, reciprocity and generosity.’ As a summary of this concept, Kemung says, ‘The concept of nareng-gareng directs the goals and interests of individuals towards the common good from which each member takes his or her share of “life”.’ The fact that the two concepts Lo and nareng-gareng are closely related in meaning can be seen from the way Kemung immediately goes on to link nareng-gareng to community rules ‘for reciprocity, for generosity, and for behaviour’ and ‘what is ethically good’, all of which are words which we have included in our understanding of ancestral Lo as used in this thesis, Kemung refers to Herman Janssen and Ennio Mantovani, two prominent Roman Catholic missiologists who had spent many years in Papua New Guinea, whose works we have also used in similar ways.

The ancestral Lo gives religious meaning to the Melanesian vision of the cosmos, which consists of the never-ending mutual interaction between the empirical and the non-empirical world, between the past and the present. This close interrelationship gives Melanesians a sense of belonging to both worlds, which makes the belief in the presence of the ancestors in the community, for good or evil, all the more real.

The great theoretician, Gerhardus Van Der Leeuw, has written concerning the role and influence of the dead in many parts of the world, and much of what he says applies to the Melanesian situation:

It is not, however, a fact that all the dead are powerful. It depends on the influence they enjoyed during their life-time, and also on the circumstance under which they died. In virtue of their rank, for instance, tribal leaders usually possess power after death also, and there are even cases where continued life after death is limited to the bearers of power. . . . The dead, then, are more potent than the living: their will imposes itself, it is irresistible. They are superior in strength and insight. . . . The dead exercise their power over man [sic] in both propitious and disastrous ways. They are terrible, and at their approach men [sic] are filled with dread. . . . From time to time this belief in the dead leads to a sort of fatalism, especially among primitive peoples: the power of the dead is so much stronger than that of the living that one surrenders completely to them; they thus control custom and usage, so that any deviation draws their anger in its train.

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41 Ibid., 14-16.
42 Ibid., 16.
43 Ibid., 17.
However, many community myths testify to the fact that the ancestors do not possess the power to grant fullness of life to the community. Perhaps it is because they take a socio-moral ambiguity with them from life to after-life. The Dani of the North Baliem valley in the West Papua Highlands have a myth which speaks about the fight between a bird and a snake. The myth says that whoever wins the fight will possess future happiness. The bird lost the fight. Because of this, the Dani believe human beings are doomed to die. This myth prepared them to believe that one day the cosmic order will be changed to allow them to slough off the old skin and regain youthfulness and eternal bliss. When they, for the first time, heard the missionaries utter the words *ki wone* – ‘the words for life’, they responded with deep awe. They saw in the missionaries the embodiment of their traditional myth:

> When immortality returns to mankind, those who learn its secret first will come over the mountains and tell you that secret. Their skins will be white, because they are constantly being renewed like the skin of a snake. Be sure to listen to them when they come, otherwise *nabelan-kabelan* – ‘my skin-your-skin’ or ‘immortality’ will pass you!\(^45\)

The origin of the *Yakili* myth of the Southern Highlands Lalibu people of Papua New Guinea is also about the departure of the good life from the reach of the people. *Yakili* is said to have created the first four men who inhabited the Lalibu basin. They were placed in four different corners of the valley, so that no one person knew of the existence of the other three. One day *Yakili* invited these four men to hear him give a speech. When *Yakili* appeared at the appointed place, the men discovered that he was half-man and half-vegetation. In his great speech, *Yakili* said: *pipnua yaguramua* (meaning ‘lose your skin; live forever’). One of the men who lived on the eastern side of the Lalibu basin arrived when *Yakili* was about to depart. The latecomer asked *Yakili*: ‘*akelaepa*?’ (meaning, ‘What have you said?’) Turning around, *Yakili* said: ‘*komanua, ralanua*’, meaning, ‘good, evil’. ‘After this *Yakili* disappeared in the sky above, never to appear again.’\(^46\) The latecomer symbolizes humans, who have missed out on immortality.

Ross Weymouth recounts one myth of the Gogodala of the Western Province of Papua New Guinea, related to *Ibali*, their epical ancestor.\(^47\) The myth speaks about the

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sexual tabu *Ibali* 'had placed on his offspring when they were migrating to the Gogodala area.' According to one of his informants,

Ibali had commanded his sons not to lie with their wives until they reached Dogona and built their houses. The men were tempted, however, when they saw their women undressing and bathing, and went and lay with them. Because they broke Ibali’s command, the joy, light, and happiness they had known before vanished.48

The mythical stories about the loss of life are quite common in Melanesian societies. These stories reflect one important aspect of the Melanesian world-view, that is, community life as Melanesians know it today is far from being the idyllic society their ancestors intended it to be.49 All of the above stories illustrate the fact that the secret of the community well-being departed from the people when they disobeyed the life-giving ancestors. If their lost secrets can be recovered, or, if and when, the ancestor with the secret of the *nabelan-kabelan* returns, the earthly society will return to its original idyllic and blissful condition. The promise or anticipation still remains a futuristic event, and this is a kind of eschatological component in Melanesian traditional religion. The key for the return of this idyllic life is in the hands of the ancestor or ancestors.

2:3 THE FUNCTIONS OF RELIGION

In Melanesia, religion is the glue that binds the past and the present into one holistic unit. The summary provided by Lawrence and Meggitt speaks for many communities in Melanesia:

The realm of the non-empirical is always closely associated with, and is in most cases part of, the ordinary physical world. It is supernatural only in a limited sense. Its most important representatives — gods, ghosts, ancestors, demons, and totems — are generally said to live on earth, often near human settlements. Although more powerful than men, they are frequently thought to have, or to be able to assume, the same corporeal form. Even when they live away from the earth, as do the Mae and Kyaka sky people, or have no fixed abode, as in the case of the Ngaing Parambik, they are hardly transcendental. Either their world is a physical replica of the earth, or they are assumed to live somewhere on the earth.50


Whilst the details of the functions of the spirits differ from place to place, on the whole, Melanesians are a spirit-conscious people. What they see: the sky, the mountains, the sea, the bushes, the trees, the rivers, the sun, the moon, and the stars, were created by gods or creator spirits. All these entities possess life and are living beings. Human beings and the spirits live together and relate to each other all the time.

For the populous Chimbu or Simbu of Papua New Guinea Highlands, the ancestral spirits matter more than the creator spirits or culture heroes, and this can be equally applied to many Melanesian communities, as stated above. This is understandable, since the ancestors, as members of the community, continually interact with the living members of their communities. Thus, concerning the Chimbu ancestors, Jenny Hughes writes,

At the heart of all Chimbu interactions with spirits is a desire for reciprocity. This may be seen in the inclusion of the ancestors at all stages of the pig festivals, the ‘games’ which are played with tricksters and the evasion which is the norm with spirits who are wholly opposed to humanity. Spirits which enter into relationships with men and women are seen as partners in the local reproduction of life. The departure of the ancestral spirits is inconceivable, and the maintenance of their goodwill an ever-abiding pre-occupation. There is so much unpredictability perceived by clansmen in the modern world that the continuity provided by the ancestors is seen as vital by clansmen and women of all ages, both rural and urban. Involvement of the ancestors and related spirits in the pig festival... is the most, concrete evidence of the continuing need for clansmen to attempt to ensure clan stability.

2:3:1 Community and Cosmos

The close relationship the Melanesians have with the spirit world allows the spirits to possess them for good or evil. It is not only a matter of the dead and the living intermingling. To the extent we call the Melanesians ‘primal religionists’, they live

in a world filled with spirit powers, between whom and himself there is a constant communication. Everything around him, the stones, the trees, the very air he breathes, is charged with mystical properties and powers, which may at any time come into his life for good or evil.

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51 One needs to be careful not to draw a great distinction between these spirits as does Hughes, since the ancestors can be considered creator-spirits or culture-heroes, cf. Jenny Hughes, 'Ancestors, Tricksters and Demons: An Examination of Chimbu Interaction with the Invisible World', Oceania 59:1 (1988): 61.

52 Ibid., 61.

I know of a man and a woman in our village who at different times were possessed by external forces. They went out of control, frightened the people, and went away wandering in the bush for several days before they returned to being normal. Our people regard certain snakes, lizards living in trees close to or by the village, or living in or under the house, or big lumps of clay or stones, or strong tree trunks in the water, to be spirit-guardians and providers for the people. These beings possess power to kill or to give life. In January 1962, we went fishing in a nearby river. Our people paddle up this river when they go to their gardens. After fishing, we cooked some of the fish over a fire and ate. On the way home I had an acute stomach ache. As soon as I got into the house I told my mother that I was having acute stomach ache. My mother immediately said, 'That is not normal stomach ache. Your cousin is making your stomach ache.'

Two months before the fishing incident, one of my cousins was killed instantly in an ambush in a land dispute by a man from inland. His body was transported in a canoe up the river back to the village. Our people believe that when someone dies in an accident, or is killed instantly, his spirit will roam around the area where he was killed seeking revenge. So, in my mother's thinking, the ache I had in my stomach was caused by my cousin's spirit. Having established this fact, my mother sent for one of the church deacons to come to pray for me. When he arrived, he was given some water in a coconut shell used as cup for drinking. He prayed over the drink, and gave it to me to drink. The moment I drank the water, the pain left me instantly. This experience makes me believe that spirits can enter a person, and do all kind of things to that person. For this reason, one needs to be careful of them all the time.

2:3:2 Community and Kinship

Melanesian understanding of kinship relationships provides solidarity and security, and unites the various clans, tribes, and villages, giving them a sense of cohesion and identity.

In the small-scale societies of Papua New Guinea, relations are primarily kinship relations. This means first of all that closely-related people tend to live together and associate with each other in various enterprises; and, secondly, that the people conceptualize and express their relationships in kinship terms, regardless of actual genealogical connection.54

54 Mary De Lepervanche, 'Social Structure', in Ryan (ed.), The Encyclopaedia, 1066.
Radcliffe-Brown sees community social structure as ‘the network of actually existing social relations in any given society’.\(^55\) At the village level, this network of solidarity is provided for by the clan, in the modern urban life, the wantok\(^56\) system meets this need.\(^57\) And yet, however strong the wantok system may be, it can never outdo the clan ties, which provide physical and spiritual solidarity, and security to every Melanesian. Wherever possible, every Melanesian dreams of returning to his or her roots to be buried next to his or her ancestral graves. The ancestral roots hold Melanesians together. A Mulapini elder of the Enga Province of Papua New Guinea put it this way:

> The possum Komaipa begot Kombike, Kombike began the Mulapini people in Yoko. These two, Komaipa and Kombike, are right at the base of the centre post of our men’s house. Like the centre post, these two founders of Mulapini (Komaipa and Kombike) hold together our whole group. . . . The Mulapini people began at Yoko. That is the place I know. But Mulapini men have gone and settled in other places, too. Yoko is the place where Mulapini clans began. Our people are like the root and trunk of a tree which has many branches. They stretch out in many different directions, but they all grow from the one root and trunk in Yoko.\(^58\)

Another kinship term which describes community solidarity is expressed by the Melanesian Pidgin term *papamama*, a generic term applicable to any elder from one’s tribe, or from other communities with established relationship.

Because the people express their relationships to each other in kinship terms, even though exact genealogical connections cannot always be traced, kinship relations cannot be considered as something existing apart from other kinds of relations. The people often say they live together and cooperate because they are kin, but a man can achieve kinship with others by living and cooperating with them. In these small-scale societies with little economic or political differentiation, kinship is not a thing in itself divorced from its economic and political context: the people use the kinship idiom to define property rights, allocate scarce resources, exclude others from enjoying certain privileges, regularize marriages, delineate status relations, and to express their solidarities: allegiances, and obligations.\(^59\)

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\(^{56}\) Originally, *wantok* is person who speaks or talks the same language. The word is now used to cover someone who comes from the same district, region or nation.


\(^{58}\) Roderic Lacey, ‘Traditions of Origin and Migration’, 45-46.

Papamama are responsible for the members of their immediate family, and those who belong to their extended family. As the papamama care for the family so the family is expected to care for their papamama. This mutual caring for each other brings power and prosperity to the entire community. The mutual responsibility experienced in life continues into the world of the dead. The community expects papamama to remain papamama when they die. The relationship established in life continues into the world of the dead also. For this reason the community must continue to provide for the needs of the departed papamama. This mutual responsibility is a two-way traffic, giving and receiving.

2:3:3 Community and Environmental Resources

Then there is the environment, as such, to be considered, connected, as it were, to the spirit world and interrelated groups. The mutual responsibility within the community involves the sharing of material goods, the resources of the environment, and the wealth of experience and wisdom of the aged. The importance of this mutual responsibility extends itself to two other areas: group ownership and group identity.

In Melanesia, ownership of land, hunting and gardening grounds, and fishing water and rivers are community based. All that grows on the land, the animals which roam around in the jungles and the bushes, and the fish in the water are community owned. Whatever is caught in the community territorial land and water in abundance has to be shared with the rest of the community. However, the community would ignore any catch that was not significant in size or quantity. Trompf points out that when people fail to share their catch with others, they come under the curse of the community, or the elder of their clan or tribe, and so ‘it is alleged that they will never catch anything again’. 60 William Edoni also points out that when the communal concept of sharing is disregarded, it breaks down community stability. 61 Benjamin Umba’s novel, centred on the life of the Chimbu people, captures the instability many communities in Melanesia must have experienced from the conflict of loyalty they faced between the wishes of their ancestors, and the new outside force represented by the presence of the missionaries. The ancestors have a full share in the life of the community. To go against their wishes and their established way of life spells instability and death. For

61 William Edoni, ‘The Confrontation of Traditional and Christian Norms and Values in Papua New
these reasons, Bombai, the chief and fight leader of the Kukane people, who lived behind the Bismarck Ranges of Papua New Guinea, summoned the men to the meeting. He called on Kagl who had gone to consult giglimogli ambu to address the gathering of men:

I have returned from a journey to see giglimogli ambu. I have consulted her, and her replies were discouraging to the human ear... She said that the recent deaths of our people are the result of the anger of our dead fathers. They are not the result of sorcery as many of us thought. They are to be taken as – let's say – punishment for the ungrateful deeds committed against our tribe and our fathers. Many more of us will pass away if we don't do something about it quickly. Some of you are deeply involved in this matter because you have sent your children to the white man to help him in his work. When their anger reaches its peak, I hear that there will be none of this village left, not even our animals.

What belongs to the community are community assets. The first ancestors fought and acquired these assets for the benefit of their succeeding generations. The assets are for the benefit of the entire family, and not just the individuals. Individuals can use these resources, but their ownership belongs to the entire family or community. This is why Narokobi argues strongly against State ownership of the people's resources,

Increasingly the land is being alienated and taken over from the people, and here lies the seed-bed of future trouble... [I]he State owns water. It owns water in the rivers. No one owns a river, the reef, or the sea anymore. That is not what the people want. They say that they own the water that flows through the streams. Now what is the logic? Where is the ethic of development, where, by the stroke of a pen, the State declares that it owns all water, all timber, and all fish... It is evident that we are dispossessing our people with concepts and ideas that are foreign to us; an example is that the State owns minerals, forests, timber, and the trees. Whoevers is sitting in Waigani may not represent anybody, but he is the embodiment of the State, and they own your timber way out in the bush. The State officials act for the State, as if they own the resources, and they often act against resource owners.

The community resources are the people’s ‘supermarkets.’ The bush, the ground, and the waters provide the people with fresh meat, food, and fish. When individuals garden, hunt, and fish, they are expected to share the product of their achievements with others in the community.

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63 Ibid., 10.
These community resources in the first place belonged to the community of ancestors. The ancestors owned them, as the first settlers or obtained them by defeating their former owners. The ancestors who owned them established Lo for the proper care and use of these resources. The ancestors still watch over these resources from the world of the dead. Serious consequences can occur when communal ancestral laws are broken. Thus, ownership of natural resources is a religious, social, and economic matter.

The present-day implications of traditional understanding of ownership are made even more complex by the quite different presuppositions which have been inculcated through Christian teaching. In spite of the community's claim to the ownership of the resources, it can be suggested that neither the government nor the people own any of the resources. They are stewards of what God has put there, and are responsible to properly administer these resources for the benefit of all the people. Since the people elect their national Parliamentarians to represent them, it would be right for the government to administer the national resources, where appropriate, for the whole nation as one big tribe, in the same way as the village elders administer properties on behalf of their tribes. Clarifying underlying assumptions like these is necessary if we are to overcome many present-day land and other property disputes.

2:3:4 Community Rituals

Community ownership is based on community identity. What binds the community to each other is not only their kinship relationship but also their belief system based on the rituals passed down by the ancestors. The religion of the people is the primary integrator of society. Anthony Wallace observed: 'religion functions for a kind of governor of society, stabilizing its members and correcting the tendency of institutions to wobble or drift'.

Melanesian children are taught early in life of their religious duties and obligations to their living and dead relatives. This was education for survival.

We stick to the rules for social behaviour endorsed by our fore-fathers. If we really follow them, the ancestors in return will then reveal their generosity (or bless us). However, if one is not truly committed to the rules for social behaviour, then there will be no fulfilment in life (or millennium). This social interrelationship and interdependence is called Lo in Pidgin. . . . Thus, the concept of Lo is associated with ancestral deities. . . . They control the power to maintain Lo and bring about the millenarian fulfilment. Observing their Lo will,

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in turn, ensure their blessing. If, however, community life has been disturbed by trespassing *Lo*, they may retaliate by withdrawing their blessing. In such a case, ritual may appease the spirits of the dead.\(^{66}\)

Traditional Melanesian communities were fully dependent on the cooperation of the spirit-world. This indicates that the dead of long ago, and of recent days, continue to influence the living community. Fullness of life, and meaningful existence, depends on honouring the ancestral spirits and their *Lo*. The ancestors were looked upon for material goods, power, and prosperity, which for the Melanesians is the full blessing of a new age. In some cultures, this new age will come at the coming of the mythical ancestor, who will usher in the abundance of a good life free of sickness, and eternal youthfulness. Amongst the Ialibu and the Huli people of the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea the focus is on the ancestors, or perhaps creator beings, to supply them with material goods. The Sentanians, though aware of eternal youthfulness being the state the dead are in, they hardly talk about the dead coming back to this life. However, as will be discussed in chapter 4 of this thesis, the Sentanians knew that the spirit of the recently departed (*maseh*) will visit the relatives to tell them of the reason for their death.\(^{67}\)

The *Lo* of the community especially includes the ritual that binds the community of the living and the community of ancestors to each other. Rituals or religious acts are performed to satisfy the demands of the *Lo*. All Melanesian communities practise rituals such as magic, sorcery, witchcraft, etc.

Ritual is, 'ary practice . . . regularly repeated in a set manner so as to satisfy one's sense of fitness.'\(^{68}\) It 'is a set of practices through which the participants relate to the sacred.'\(^{69}\) Edmund Leach sees rituals as the means whereby the community stores and transmits information of relevant cultural or religious knowledge through the generations, comparable to modern mathematics, and the information storage of

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\(^{67}\) This thesis, under Sentani, chapter 4, page 117.


\(^{69}\) *Ibid.*, 220.
computers. Gluckman defines ritual in terms of social structure, while Van Gennep, Tylor, and Frazer see rituals 'as the fruit of mental process and ideas.'

In the mind of Melanesians, rituals are expressions of absolute unquestioned power and truth, the guarantee of success in all aspects of their religious practices. The reasons for viewing the rituals as they do are due to the association rituals have with their myths and the departed elders or ancestors of their community. As Lawrence argues, myths and rituals in New Guinea have the same importance as the Scriptures and the Mass had in medieval Europe.

Ritual is the bridge between the physical and the non-physical world. In Melanesia, rituals are associated with such practices as magic, sorcery, witchcraft, dancing, singing, etc. As an important part of Melanesian religion, it provides the content of the belief of the people. Ritual, therefore, gives man [sic] the assurance that he can control, regulate, or manipulate the cosmic order by means of ritual. He is thus the master of his own destiny. Like myths in the intellectual field, ritual is regarded, in the field of action, as an expression of absolute unquestioned power and truth. It is the guarantee of success in all-important economic, social, and political undertakings.

Rituals in Melanesia constitute the Lo of the ancestors – the bridge that binds the living and the dead to each other. Rituals, as religious practices reveal the true values and concerns of the community. What Monica Wilson has written about the Tanzanian situation in Africa, I see as applicable also to Melanesian societies,

Rituals reveal values at their deepest level... [M]en express in ritual what moves them most, and since the form of expression is conventionalized and obligatory, it is the values of the group that are revealed. I see in the study of rituals the key to an understanding of the essential constitution of human societies.

The close association the living and the dead have as members of the community reveal the deep values and concerns Melanesians give to rituals. Magic, sorcery, and

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74 Mantovani, 'Ritual in Melanesia', in Mantovani (ed.), *An Introduction to Melanesian Religions*, 1984, 169.
witchcraft, as rituals represent the Lo, the thoughts and wishes of the ancestors. Malinowski believes ritual is practised to ease anxiety and 'inspire confidence in man [sic] to face an unbridgeable gap in their empirical knowledge'. Rituals were, and are, practised to overcome anxiety and to ensure the goodwill of the ancestors. Individuals perform garden magic to ease the anxiety of unproductiveness, bad crops, or unforeseen natural disasters. Community rituals were performed to ease the anxiety of displeasure from the spirit world, or death from the hands of the enemy.

People experience anxiety when they do not perform the appropriate ritual for a certain religious activity at a given time. Garden rituals are performed at the time of clearing the bush and planting of the crops, to enlist the ancestors' blessing to grant them good harvest, to prevent wild pigs from destroying the garden, and so on. Because the people have performed the ritual in accordance with the rites, and because they hold the beliefs associated with it, they are confident that the results will be as they expect.

Thus rituals represent the deeper realities of community life and practice. They are the bridge which provides a harmonious relationship between the visible and the invisible world. Death does not completely cut off the strong relationship the living relatives have with the departed members of their family or community.

2:4 THE NEED FOR RELIGION

Religion exists for the benefit of human beings. This section touches on themes which have been covered already, but from the perspective of human needs. An important part of Melanesian belief is that those who have died continue to live on. As an integral part of Melanesian life, religion binds the past and present to each other. The dead are part of the living community, and one day they will appear in a human body. For the community to obtain power and prosperity, contact with the spirit world is established through the ritual in speech and action. When the rain magician wishes to bring rain on the land, he will spit betelnut juice into the air and speak out the rain magic. What Maori Kiki says about his Orokolo people is true also of other Melanesian communities.

My mother's people always referred to the dead as 'going to the West', because they did not bury the dead in the ground but placed them high up in the branches of a tree, facing the sunset. They did not believe in the last judgment, and they had no concept of heaven or hell. But they believed that the dead are ever present, and that they can be called upon to help in any dangerous situation. I have never grown out of this belief myself. Even though I know that God is with

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me, I also know that my mother is with me. In times of danger, say a car accident, I call her name first: Eau. My mother died in 1958, the year I got married. From time to time my wife and I prepare a special meal and we set aside plates for my mother and for her father (whom she loved most) and we call their names and leave the food there whilst we eat our own share. This food will later be put away, it can never be eaten. We do this so that we can think better of our dead.77

The Manam people believe that at death the soul goes on a journey. His entrance into anua mate mate (land of the dead) depends on the proper feast performed by the living relatives. If the nanaranga (the Big-man) is dissatisfied, the soul of the departed is ordered to return to the land of the living.78 The Kwaio of the Solomon Islands believe the ancestors have direct contact with members of their own clan and participate 'in the everyday life of the community, humans talk daily with these unseen members of the group and nightly encounter them whilst their own bodies sleep'.79 The Trobriand Islanders believe that the baloma (the spirit of the dead)

visits his native village from time to time, and he is visited by his surviving friends and relatives. Some of these latter possess the faculty of getting right into the shadowy world of spirits. Others are able to get a glimpse only of the baloma, to hear them, to see them from a distance, or in the dark – just sufficiently clearly to recognize them, and to be absolutely sure that they are baloma.80

The Huli of the Southern Highlands have a less clear idea of the future of the soul after death. While the ghosts of warriors and others slain in battle go to Dalgali, a celestial resting place,

the soul of those who die from other causes continue to dwell among the living, taking an interest in their affairs. Some people say that a father's ghost hovers over its former habitation waiting to collect the souls of his children and his wives. Others say that the souls of the dead sink into the pools of quiet water at river bends, or that the ghost travels southward to the country of the Cugube where it finds a circle of red clay, stoops to collect some and suddenly tips forward into a black hole. The belief in the persistence of the soul stresses continuity rather than eternity; there is no positive concept of personal immortality, but there is concern with the fate of ghosts. Curiously enough, ghosts continue to age even though they have no physical bodies. Their hair turns white, their limbs stiffen and cataracts form on their eyes.81

77 Kiki, Ten Thousand Years in a Life Time, 1968, 6.
The Yali of the Highlands of West Papua believe that the spirits of the recent dead and those of their ancestors 'live in or near the village to protect it or to care for it'.\(^{82}\) Whilst the ancestors play no part in the Manam belief, the recent dead can be called on to help in major undertakings or in trouble times.\(^{83}\)

Virtually all Melanesian communities hold to the presence of ancestors among them to a greater or lesser extent.\(^{84}\) Right from their childhood, Melanesians come to understand that the dead are part of the community.

When a young Melanesian entered the community, it was a community of both the living and the dead, of men, women, and ancestors. For most Melanesian societies, the ancestors or dead relatives were an integral, supportive part of the whole company of souls, so that the ordinary humans were dependent on their aid, their more-than-human power, and at the very least on their satisfaction.\(^{85}\)

The examples cited so far show that religion meets the need of the people, and is an important part of their community life. The dead, being part of the community, exert their influence on the living. The living community looks to the dead as the source of good will and blessing. Religion plays a protective role for the Melanesians. This highlights the need for a belief in the ancestral spirits.

Whilst some Melanesian societies regard spirits and ancestors as antagonistic, or unpredictable in their attitudes towards the living, for a majority of Papua New Guinean cultures there is little doubt that they are seen as basically helpful in their continuing role amongst the living.

Traditional Melanesian belief is personal and private. What one group of people knows and achieves from the spirit world belongs to them, it is their secret access to blessing. The ancestors, the recent dead, and the autonomous spirits live with and observe the community life and activity all the time. They have the power to bless the community or to withdraw their blessing, as one Simbu put it:

The ancestor spirits overshadow our whole lives like a cloud and we have to be conscious of that fact. So we keep them in perpetual remembrance in our ceremonies and rituals. They hold in their hands the power for fertility for crops, for animals, and also for us humans. They give us the strength to produce

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\(^{83}\) Franks, 'Death Rites', 110.

\(^{84}\) Whilst a belief concerning the presence of ancestors may be doubtful in the case of some Melanesian societies, the belief is sufficiently general and wide-spread to be treated in the rest of this thesis as a characteristic common to Melanesian societies generally.

offspring. Our children will grow into healthy members of our community, who will always worship and remember the ancestors. So to produce offspring is regarded as a religious act toward the spirits, and thus marriage receives its religious value.\textsuperscript{86}

The ancestors do not only control human productivity. They control the social, economic, and political life of the people also. As \textit{papa bitong graun} (owners of the ground), the ancestors own the land, the environment, the particular geographical area the people live in. The ancestors, in the form of \textit{masalai} (bush-spirit), are responsible for the protection of their clan. The sickness they cause, known as clan sickness, can only be cured by the leaders or elders of that particular clan.\textsuperscript{87} Whenever acting as culture heroes, which they very often do in Melanesia, the ancestors are responsible for the creation and the preservation of the cosmos to which the people belong.\textsuperscript{88}

Melanesians see their dead relatives continuing to live on in a different form of existence, possessing more power and wisdom. Their understanding of the dream may contribute to this kind of belief. It is widely believed in societies across Melanesia that the soul leaves the body in a dream,\textsuperscript{89} travels to different places for a short time, then returns to the body. At death, the soul departs the body permanently, usually close to the place it has left. The soul travels from place to place until it settles somewhere permanently. In this way life continues to go on. The spirits of the ancestors, and those of the recent dead, live together with the living members in one united society.\textsuperscript{90} The concept of a united society brings the living and the dead into an interdependence and reciprocal relationship with each other. Reciprocity, retribution, and revenge are related religious concepts. At the heart of these concepts is the idea of give and take, blessed to be a blessing. Trompf observes,

\begin{quote}
The heart-beat of Melanesian religions, I estimate, lies in that constant round of give-and-take – or of payback, both vengeful and conciliatory – from which has been generated great wariorhood, the excitement of ceremonial exchange, the anxiety felt during the funerary and healing rituals, and the most prolonged intra-group discussions over why events turned out as they did.\textsuperscript{91}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{89} This belief however is not universal as we show on page 69 where we speak about people entering the spirit world to have audience with the spirit of the departed or with gods.

\textsuperscript{90} Nilles, ‘Simbu Ancestors’, 165.

\textsuperscript{91} Trompf, \textit{Melanesian Religion}, 19-20.
The departed warriors, in Melanesian thinking, continue to be warriors in the land of the dead. When their help is needed, the community calls on them to accompany them in the fight, or to infuse the fighters with their skill and courage. This understanding makes the people conscious of their need for religion.

Success in war, furthermore, or in the working out of conflict with enemies, was closely bound up with Melanesian notions of well-being, prosperity and group vitality. If anything distinguishes Melanesian religions from most, it is their apparent emphasis on the material results of rituals and of relationships with the more-than-human. Blessing is far less inward peace of the soul . . . or bodily health . . . than abundance in pigs or other foodstuffs and valuables. Group wealth or victory* is taken as a reflection of good relationships between humans and the spirit order, and in many cases as the possession of procedural skills or knowledge . . . which make for successful hunting, fishing, gardening, and so on.**

What the ancestors and other departed members of the community constituted was a body of knowledge for community well-being and survival. Leach views rituals as the means whereby the community stores and transmits information, or relevant cultural knowledge, through the generations. He sees this information as being equal to modern mathematics, or the information storage of computers.* The elders are the custodians of rituals. They are responsible to pass on their skill, wisdom, and wealth of experience to the younger generation. When the elders do this, they, in actual fact, pass on to the younger generation knowledge for power and prosperity.

Part of what the elders passed on was magic as a formula in the form of words. The words by themselves are ineffective unless accompanied by the 'blessing' or the good pleasure of the departed spirits. For magic to be effective, the magician must use the correct words of the formula, observe the correct tabus, and call on the ancestor by his name.

Ritual, which often has to be supported by the observance of taboos, may take any of the following forms. For spirit-beings, it may be seen as substitute for face-to-face relationships, and may emphasize or combine any of three approaches: propitiation by prayers or offerings; bargaining with offerings; or what is often called coercion — usually the attempt to create by invocation or spell reciprocal relationships, which are modelled on those in human society, and in which spirit-beings automatically confer material benefits on men. Occult forces are believed to be controlled by sympathetic magic, power being

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* Italics, mine.
** Ibid., 20.
attributed, as already indicated, either entirely to the ritual itself or to the spirit-beings said to have invented the techniques involved.\textsuperscript{95}

Bronislaw Malinowski also observes the same points:

The force of magic can be produced only and exclusively within traditionally prescribed rites. It can be received and learned only by due initiation into the craft, and by taking over of the rigidly-defined system of conditions, acts, and observances. Even when magic is discovered or invented it is invariably conceived as true revelation from the supernatural. Magic is an intrinsic, specific, quality of a situation, consisting in the object being amenable to human control by means which are specially and uniquely connected with the object, and which can be handled only by appropriate people.\textsuperscript{96}

For magic to be effective, or to achieve its desired end, it must be performed in association with the prescribed rites or stored knowledge. The magical rites spoken by the magician must follow the prescribed rites passed down by the ancestors. Words and actions must go together. There were times when magic was passed on without undergoing the prescribed rites. A father would pass on his magic to his son when the father knew that his time to die had come. This would normally happen by the father's bedside. In present-day Papua New Guinea, magic can be bought. What is important is remembering the exact words rather than the method used to pass on the magic. In any case, magic permeates the life of many people in Melanesia.

Melanesians practise rituals because of the great benefit they bring to the community. The secret passed on by the dead becomes the *mana* of the community. R. H. Codrington who introduced the word *mana* into the English language, wrote that

The Melanesian mind is entirely possessed by the belief in a supernatural power or influence, called almost universally *mana*. This is what works to effect everything which is beyond the ordinary power of men, outside the common processes of nature; it is present in the atmosphere of life, attaches itself to persons and to things, and is manifested by results which can only be ascribed to its operation. When one has got it he can use it and direct it, but its force may break forth at some new point; the presence of it is ascertained by proof.\textsuperscript{97}

Perhaps he drew too much of a generalization from Ni-Vanuatu materials, yet Codrington posited that 'all Melanesian religion consists, in fact, in getting this *mana*

\textsuperscript{95} P. Lawrence and M. J. Meggitt 'Introduction to', *Gods*, 8-9.

\textsuperscript{96} Malinowski, 'The Role of Magic and Religion', in Lessa and Vogt (ed.), *Reader*, 43.

for one's self, or getting its use for one's benefit', and his arguments, are not without persuasion. Codrington links mana with magic and witchcraft.

That invisible power which is believed by the natives to cause all such effects as transcend their conception of the regular course of nature, and to reside in spiritual beings, whether in the spiritual part of living men or in the ghosts of the dead, being imparted by them to their names and to various things that belong to them, such as stones, snakes, and, indeed, objects of all sorts, is that generally known as mana. No man, however, has this power on his own; all that he does is done by the aid of personal beings, ghosts, or spirits; he cannot be said, as a spirit can, to be mana himself; using the word to express a quality; he can be said to have mana, it may be said to be with him, the word being used as a substantive... By whatever name it is called, it is the belief in this supernatural power, and in the efficacy of the various means by which spirits and ghosts can be induced to exercise it for the benefit of men, that is the foundation of the rites and practices which can be called religious; and it is from the same belief that everything which may be called Magic and Witchcraft draws its origin.

The survival of the younger generation, the on-going harmony and well-being of their community, and the maintenance of power and prosperity of the community are dependent on the mana of the community passed on to them by their elders. The mana

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88 *Ibid.*, 119. Anne Salmond is of the opinion that 'Codrington took the word mana from Mota, one of the Banks Island languages, and generalized it into a term for “supernatural power” in all of Melanesia, although relatively few Melanesian languages have mana in their vocabularies', cf. Anne Salmond, 'Tribal Words, Tribal Worlds: The Translatability of tapu or mana', in Macmarshall and John L. Caughey (eds.), *Culture, Kin, and Cognition in Oceania: Essays in Honour of Ward H. Goodenough* (Washington: American Anthropological Association, 1989), 60. Since Salmond is dealing with ethnometrics in her article, her contention with Codrington is probably justifiable. It needs to be remembered, however, that not having the exact word in a language does not necessarily mean that the people were not aware of the incomprehensible supernatural powers they encountered daily for which they had such reverential awe. As an example, Apea speaks of puri in terms of strength, energy and power. Puri is associated with the beings who possess it rather than describing its nature, cf. Simon Apea, 'Footprints of God in Ialibu', in May (ed.), *Living Theologies*, 234-237. Salmond credits Frederick Mair for the earliest account on mana based on his studies amongst the Maori of New Zealand, who concluded that mana is difficult to translate; its meaning covers such concepts as: virtues, authority, good fortune, influence, sanctity, luck, 'Tribal Words', 66-67. Codrington’s idea of mana as an invisible medium of power, has been challenged recently by Roger Keesing who sees mana more as a quality rather than power, cited in Whitemar, 'Melanesian Religions: An Overview', in Mantovani (ed.), *Melanesian Religions*, 98-101. Perhaps the best we can say is that mana is both power and quality. Further discussions on mana can be found in Theodore Ahrens, 'Concepts of Power in a Melanesian and Biblical Perspective', in Knight (ed.), *Christ in Melanesia*, 61-86; Arthur Capell, 'The Word Mana: A Linguistic Survey', *Oceanica* 9 (1938): 89-96; Wayne T. Dye, 'A Theology of Power for Melanesia.' *Catalyst* 14:1 and 2 (1984): 57-75 and 158-180; Raymond Firth, 'The Analysis of Mana: An Empirical Approach', *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 49 (1960): 483-510; A. M. Hocart, 'Mana', *Man* 14 (1914): 97-101; Hocart 'Natural and Supernatural', *Man* 32 (1932): 59-61; Ian H. Hogbin, 'Mana', *Oceanica* 6 (1936): 241-274; Roger M. Keesing, *Kwato Religion*, 1982, passim; Keesing 'Rethinking Mana', *Journal of Anthropological Research* 40 (1984): 137-156; Alan R. Tippett, *Solomon Island Christianity: A Study in Growth and Obstruction* (London: Lutterworth Press), passim; Esau Tuza, 'Spirits and Powers in Melanesia', in Habel (ed.), *Powers*, 97-108.

89 In some Melanesian societies, mana is also used to describe a natural innate power over which the possessor has no control.

of the community operates on the exact words or formula received from the elders or ancestors.

In a recent study done, on Enga women of Papua New Guinea, it was shown that women use magic or spells to determine the success of their marriage; to protect men against menstrual pollution; to grow good pigs and food; to establish a good relationship in marriage; to allow women to prepare food after a period of seclusion during menstruation; to neutralize harmful affects of magic; to ensure the wholesome development of the foetus; to determine the gender of the child; to determine the time of birth; to hasten or postpone delivery; to appease spirits; to ensure the healthy growth of the child; to allow the father to view the baby for the first time; to grow strong teeth; to make children strong, active and healthy; to control pregnancy; to make pigs strong and healthy; to tame wild pigs; to attract gifts of meat into a new string bag at public gatherings; to attract more wealth, and many more things.\footnote{101}

Maori Kiki speaks about child-birth, and garden and war magic.\footnote{102} Somare mentions canoe magic.\footnote{103} Lawrence speaks about love magic carried out with or without invoking a creator deity.\footnote{104} For the Mekeo people (near Port Moresby), magic gives status and power to the war magician and the sorcerer who use their knowledge and skill to divert the enemy arrows and to ensure their own arrows hit the enemy.\footnote{105} The mana of magic has the power to isolate and draw the victim closer to the waiting enemy to be killed at close range.\footnote{106}

The success of magic depends on the correct use of the formula, that is, using the right words and procedures. To forget some words or to neglect some parts of the procedures would make the operation ineffective, or cause it to backfire on the performers. Another set of men’s spells covered the major body parts from the head to the toes — should one be forgotten, then the entire sequence was believed to be ineffective. Other men’s spells applied more directly to success in public events, and the ability to obtain wealth. Amongst these is a spell to prevent the smell of a woman’s vagina from blocking the man’s nose and taking away his sense in handling social relations. Should this happen, at feasts or pig exchanges, he would wait and wait for his name to be called out to receive pork, a live pig, or some other valuable, but would receive nothing. Eventually he would become a poor man. To avoid having his nose blocked, the man would put a piece of lakanda bark in his nose, recite a spell calling the names of

\footnote{102}{Kiki, \textit{Ten Thousand Years}, 12, 16, 20.}
\footnote{103}{Somare, \textit{Sana}, 36.}
\footnote{104}{Lawrence, ‘Religion and Magic’, in Ryan (ed.), \textit{Encyclopaedia}, 1003, and Hogbin, \textit{Anthropology}, 206-207.}
\footnote{105}{Michelle Stephen, ‘Sorcery, Magic and Mekeo World-view’, in Habel (ed.), \textit{Powers}, 150.}
\footnote{106}{An oral Sentanian war story from the village of Sosirih on the western end of Lake Sentani.}
mythical sky beings, and requesting that his name remain open. At the end of
the spell he would blow out the piece of bark.\footnote{Kynakas and Wiesner, \textit{From Inside the Women's House}, 79.}

2:4:1 Gods and Deities

Across the region, we find that people knew of the existence of a Great Spirit or Being, and other spirit beings who were different from their ancestral spirits. In times of extreme need, they called on the Supreme Being to help them. This discussion is introduced here, but will be discussed more in the next chapter. The Great Spirit or Being is viewed as creator-god or hero by some Melanesian communities, and a divine ruler by others. An example of a creator-god is \textit{Tawa} for the Wasisi people of West Sepik. A long time ago the people believe \textit{Tawa} existed on his own. The people think of him as the source of all things. \textit{Tawa} is responsible for the present community life of the people.\footnote{Peter van Hees, ‘Traditional Marriage Among the Wassisi’, in Habel (ed.), \textit{Powers}, 84.} \textit{Tudava}, for the Trobriand Islanders, is another example.

Examples of a divine ruler can be seen in such a being as \textit{nanaranga}, or ‘Bigman’, for the Manam people. The \textit{nanaranga} has the power to decide whether the soul of the departed will continue its journey to \textit{anua matemate} (the blissful place), or to return to the earth.\footnote{Franks, ‘Death Rites’, in Habel (ed.), \textit{Powers}, 116-117.} \textit{Datagaliwabe}, for the Huli people in the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea, is another instance of such a divine ruler. \textit{Datagaliwabe} is a unique spirit who punishes the people who break family rules. He cannot be influenced in any way by people, ghosts, or other gods. ‘A man can escape his obligations in one parish by fleeing to another territory, but he cannot escape the omnipresent eye of \textit{Datagaliwabe}.’\footnote{R. M. Glasse, \textit{The Huli}, in Lawrence and Meggitt, \textit{Gods}, 49.} Some Huli Christians think that \textit{Datagaliwabe} is their cultural equivalent of the Christian God, and are keen to see that name in their Huli Bible.\footnote{This information was obtained from Alan and Valerie Sinclair, who have served as missionaries with Unevangelized Field Mission (UFM) since 1964, which became Asia Pacific Christian Mission (APCM), now known as Pioneers. The Sinclairs now live in Auckland in New Zealand. They visit Papua New Guinea as translation consultants to the national translators of the Huli Bible. They make periodical visits to Papua New Guinea to consult with national translators of the Evangelical Church of Papua New Guinea. Alan did not live on to see the dedication of the Huli Bible in November 2002, because the Lord took him home in 2001.}

Some tribal myths in Melanesia speak about the return of the mythical ancestor represented in some way by their creator-gods or divine rulers. The myths of the two brothers from Madang, and also that of the Koreri movement of the island of Biak in Irian Jaya, are considered as two representatives now described below.
The myth of the two brothers of the Madang area, Manub and Kilibob, has several versions. The myth anticipates the eventual reunion and reconciliation of the two brothers. Rufus Pech has rightly called the myth, 'Melanesian Models for Brotherhood, Shaped by Myth, Dream, and Drama'. The two brothers can be a coastal Papua New Guinean and a Highlander, or a short, brown-skinned Papua New Guinean and a tall fair-skinned European. The Sepik version of the myth has brown and white brothers. At the time the Germans settled in New Guinea, the people identified them as the younger brother who had at last returned home. When the Germans did not share what they had with the people, their elder brother thought that one day the younger brother would grow up and recognize his obligation to his older brother, and the older brother's rightful ownership of the goods as his birthright. This has not happened so the people still await the return of the brother.  

Pech's summary of the myth states:

The open-ended versions of the myth, in which the culture-grounding spirit has gone away to live at or beyond the boundaries of the inhabited world, beyond the last-known horizon, are often associated with the myth or the return of one or both of the Brothers. The concept of Lo requires that the kros (the anger and quarrel) cannot be the final word between brothers. The more serious the initial anger was, and the longer the period of separation and kros has been, the greater must be the end-salvation experience, when finally the brother or brothers return, and the circle of reconciliation is again complete. Only with this moment of tension, this yearning for the reconciliation necessarily yet to come, does the salvation aspect of the Two Brothers myth reach its eschatological dimension.

The myth of the Koreri movement in West Papua is about fullness of life out of suffering, a perfect body for an imperfect one, material wealth instead of poverty and nothingness. The central character of the myth is Yawi Nushado, who becomes Manarmakeri (the scabious old man), also known as Mansren in the myth. The myth begins with Yawi tracing human footprints of a pig he has speared in his garden, ending up in a cave face-to-face with Koreri, the village of youthful inhabitants, full of laughter and joy. He recognized some of the people as relatives who had died but have become

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112 Pech, Manub and Kilibob, et passim.
113 Ibid., 216-217.
young again. Undue preoccupation with what he saw and experienced in the cave made him neglect his personal hygiene so his body was covered with scabies. His own people and relatives considered him an outcast. After experiencing a series of disappointments and rejection, life took on new meaning for him. Through some unexpected miracles that took place, he married the most beautiful girl in the village. Together with their son Manarbew, 'bringer of peace', born supernaturally, they set out in a ship going to the west.\textsuperscript{115}

Before travelling further west, Mansar left some commandments for the people to observe, promising to return after seven generations. The observance of the commandments is the prerequisite for being one of his followers. These commandments are:

1. Eat no pumpkin and no pork, for pumpkin and pork caused Mansar to leave Sopen (his original island).

2. Eat no snakes or crabs, for all animals which shed their skin have a special relationship to the change which took place in Mansar's body.

3. Shed no blood, for where blood is shed there can be no peace, and this prevents Mansar's (Koreri) coming.

4. Build houses for the dead who will be raised by Mansar.

5. Build store houses for the food which Mansar will bring with him.

6. Gather a great deal of firewood, for before Mansar's arrival there will be darkness for three days.\textsuperscript{116}

These stories of Manub and Kilibob and Mansren are about the return of the mythical ancestor, and the renewal of the cosmos.

The salvation which is anticipated, and which will be brought by the ancestor, involves all known structures of society and the cosmos. Salvation will eventuate here, on this earth, in this present time. It is a concrete, this-worldly salvation for which the Melanesians hope. 'Salvation' means freedom from want and sickness, relief from the pressures of work and time, a state of wholeness and health, a regaining of one's prestige and self-respect.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{115} \textit{Ibid.}, 21-27.

\textsuperscript{116} \textit{Ibid.}, 27.

The people expected this total renewal among themselves because they were prepared for this by their annual festivals, dreams and visions. Two examples of these annual festivals are the Simbu Pig Festival and the Wapi Fish Festival. They symbolize the renewal of the earth, and the overall blessing the people will enjoy.

The Simbu people of the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea, when they celebrate Pig Festival, do so not so much to honour the ancestors as to obtain universal renewal. The festival is a fertility feast. The people celebrate it to bring about renewal for the whole creation: humans, animals, vegetables, and the whole earth. The festival is celebrated with the sprinkling of pig blood on ancestral bones, kaukau (sweet potato) runners, the digging sticks, etc. About the sprinkling of the blood on the ancestral bones, Mantovani writes:

As the ancestors are members of the clan, they are given their share of life blood. Yes, we have to deal with ancestors, but in a different way than we thought. They are not the centre, but participate with the living in a situation of need. What is celebrated is not the power of their historical ancestors but the cosmic renewal. The historical ancestors do not give it; they receive it, they participate in it with the living members of the clan. As we look after the old father here in this life, so we look after him and the other tumbunas when they are dead. Further presupposed is the fact that the departed have the same feelings and reactions as when alive. We share with them the life as they need it, and have a right to it as clan members. They would vindicate themselves if excluded, like any other living member would do if excluded. The relation to them is the same as the relation to the old men in the clan, with an extra dimension. We can see the old men and please them before they get angry, but we cannot see ancestors, so we have to be more careful. Here there are both filial piety and fear. The life itself which is given comes from the death of the pig, the blood being the natural sign of it, and the red colour the symbol.118

The Wapi Fish Festival is about life, growth and identity with the spirit world. About the functions of this festival, McGregor says:

It becomes immediately apparent that this complex festival embraces most aspects of the total culture. Indeed, it is difficult to name one major area of the people's life to which this festival is not related. Sickness, health, growth of children, general well-being, hunting, gardening, the economy and exchange system, kinship responsibilities, social structure, values, marriage, and religion are some of the many interrelated ingredients which make Fish-Festival the life of the people. Many of the basic needs are met within the festival... Within the festival the villagers relate themselves with their spiritual world, meeting religious needs. Both the personal (spirits) and impersonal (magic) spiritual forces are used to bring about desired results. They view the world as basically hostile, full of malicious supernatural power. But in following their ritual they

118 Mantovani, 'A Fundamental Melanesian Religion', 156.
secure a confidence that they will escape calamities, be healthy, successful in hunting, and have strong children. Thus are they delivered from a totally fatalistic outlook, and acquire a measure of confidence and hope.\textsuperscript{119}

The Fish Festival represents life, healing, and protection. Unmarried and barren women dance with bottles as babies in the sling, or carry other women's babies, the sick ones dance with their own masks, or have representatives dance with their masks for them. In this way, the people show their silent cry to the spirits to give them children and health. At the end of the festival, all the sick people or their representatives shoot the fish masks with arrows to tell the spirits that since they have been well honoured through the dance, they should now give healing to the sick, protection and blessing to the community, and depart to their homes. At the heart of the Fish Festival, there is the expectation of community renewal to be ushered in by the ancestral spirits.

The departed ancestors are part of the community. The people honour them and provide for them as they do for the living people. These beliefs and practices come from the fact that when the soul of life leaves the body at death it continues to live on. The stories like Manub and Kilibob and Manarmakeri make the people believe that one day the departed ancestors, or at least great ones, will come back. The great pig and fish festivals make the people believe that one day the whole earth will be renewed. This renewal will be brought to reality by the great mythical ancestor.

The examples we have discussed above represent adjustment, or protest, movements, which are concerned with notions of salvation. In this thesis, the traditional Melanesian concept of salvation is described as a fullness of life, or a harmoniously peaceful community living, based on adherence to the Lo established by the ancestors, parallels the concept of nareng-gareng expounded by Kemung. This fullness of life will be realised at the coming of the ancestor or ancestors.

On pages 214-216, under 6:3:4:2:2, we have related this fullness of life to the salvation bought about by Jesus by His incarnation and death on the cross. Jesus came at the right time to fulfil all expectations of salvation, including notions of salvation found in adjustment, or protest movements. Jesus is God's full and final answer to all the longings of the human heart. Jesus is to be seen as the fulfilment of the myths of the two brothers, Manub and Kilibob, and that of Manarmareki, or Mansar. The same Jesus

\textsuperscript{119} Donald E. McGregor, The Fish and the Cross, Point Series No. 1, 2nd edition (1982): 82-83.
who came and died for the salvation of human beings will return one day to restore everything to their God-intended original state of being.

2:5 SUMMARY
This chapter sets out in a general way how Melanesian religion is rooted in their belief about the ancestors. The rituals they performed to enhance the relationship between the living and the living-dead keep the community of the living and the dead perpetually dependent on each other. Religion for Melanesians is the means by which their daily needs are met. Deep in the hearts and minds of Melanesians there is the expectation that one day the environment or the cosmos they belong to will be renewed. This renewal will take place when the ancestors or ancestor return(s). What are we to make of all these? How are we to look at them? Christianity would offer some new answers to their longings. We turn to look at these questions in the next chapter in a general way as we consider the influence of Christianity on the Melanesian culture.
CHAPTER THREE

MELANESIAN ANCESTRAL HERITAGE AND CHRISTIANITY

3:1 INTRODUCTION

The discussion in chapter two provides the framework for understanding Melanesian ancestral heritage. This understanding offers the people the basis for evaluating new belief systems including Christianity. Christianity, as a religious system, must be explained in terms of the old traditional system. The new needs to be built on the foundation of the old.

This chapter examines three related issues about Christianity in Melanesia:

- The Preparation for the Coming of the Gospel
- Melanesian Ancestral Heritage, Christianity and Christendom
- Melanesian Ancestral Heritage, the Way of Salvation and the Gospel

3:2 THE PREPARATION FOR THE COMING OF THE GOSPEL

Melanesians believe in, and follow, the directions of the ancestors because there is reality in what they see and experience. The ancestors represent beings and powers greater than themselves. As custodians of the Melanesian cosmos, the ancestors very often pointed communities to creative deities and community preservers who were greater and more powerful than the ancestors themselves. This knowledge made the people believe in the existence of these beings, and they sought to establish a relationship with them. This belief in the existence of other realities prepared Melanesians for the coming of the Gospel.

3:2:1 Belief in ‘High Gods’

Melanesians have always been conscious of the existence of beings other than their ancestors. The following examples demonstrate that belief in the ancestor spirits and the Supreme Beings existed side-by-side in Melanesia. Where they honoured them, Melanesians regarded the Supreme Beings as beings stronger and more powerful than
their own ancestors. But there are variations to the conceived relationships between the 'high gods', lesser deities, and ancestors, and to degrees of importance placed on their 'supremacy'.

The Melpa of the Western Highlands of Papua New Guinea, as well as seeking assistance from the ancestral spirits, in times of extremity (such as lack of food), would climb up a tree and, looking up into the sky, call out to Ogla Nuknuk, the great god or spirit who looks down from the sky, to meet their needs. When they heard the powerful rumbling of thunder the people of the Western Highlands told each other that someone up there in the sky, or beyond the sky, was angry, and they sensed someone greater than their ancestors was behind it. These people also venerated the sun, which was above all, whilst giving much of their attention to their ancestors. The people of Ialibu in the Southern Highlands regarded Yakili as their creator-god. They see Yakili as the maker and provider for the people. The people think of him as one who sits in the sky above and looks down on them. In appearance, Yakili is partly human and partly vegetation. He is thus viewed as the creator of human beings and the vegetation (or the physical world). The people of Ialibu, and all of the Kewa speakers, accepted Yakili as the one single being who created the world and man, and who, at the same time, controlled them. They accepted and honoured him as the one whose origin was not to be perceived and comprehended, at least from the human point of view. Yakili was not considered to be the god of any individual or family or tribe, but he was the god for the whole of the Kewa people. As creator, Yakili has power over human beings and all of creation, he is the controller and life-giver of the universe the people live in. To maintain good relationships with him, the people are required to offer 'prayers, sacrifices, and worship'.

Turning to the coastal people and the islands, we find Matthew Tamoane speaks of the people of Darapap of Murik Lakes in East Sepik, and their strong belief in Jari, a goddess, descended from a snake who is responsible for the origin of fire, betelnut,

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2 Notes on interview with Ogla Makanhi, Port Moresby, October 29, 1995.
3 This is what Neville Bartle, a missionary with the Church of the Nazarene, told this author in an interview about the people of the Jimi Valley, a branch of the Wahgi in the Western Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea. When these people heard about the Christian God they immediately associated Him with the thunder.
4 Apca, Footprints, 226.
5 Ibid., 221.
tobacco, male reproductive organs, magic, the rivers, and more. The Orokaiva people of the Oro Province in Papua New Guinea credit the control of community affairs to Asisi, a supreme being, and in the 1930s the people carried out mass killings of pigs for the Asisi (spirit) cult.

In some of these cases, perhaps, we may not be convinced of the being a supreme deity; in others, however, the High God example presents itself more obviously. These variations show up from the highlands to the coasts.

There is a similar pattern of belief in the islands. The Tolais of West New Britain attributed the planets, the physical environment, and such phenomena as earthquake and volcanoes to the Kaia (mystery), or mysterious Supreme Being, transcending all other spirits. The people offered sacrifices of animals and garden produce to appease Kaia in times of disaster, and to remember their dead relatives who are thought to be with him. The Siwai people of the North Solomons believe that when the mumiaku (the clan leader) performs the rituals, the clan god, Hagoro is personally present, and will give power to the mumiaku. They believe that Hagoro knows what the people need, and, therefore, he will grant the mumiaku the petition of the people.

Various peoples, we discovered, accorded these high spirit beings an intriguingly paralleled honour and respect they gave to their Paramount Chiefs. That is to say, they sought assistance from the Supreme Being only when it was absolutely necessary, as in times of disaster. Eliade has pointed out that this kind of attitude is common among many primal societies. Scholars in the history of religion have a general agreement concerning the existence and influence of 'Supreme Beings' or 'High gods', or 'Sky gods'.

After a lengthy debate among scholars, little doubt remains that sophisticated theologies of supreme beings predate the introduction through missionaries or colonial influence of theological ideas from historical monotheism.
Supreme Beings typically turn out to be divinities with transcendent spiritual power, omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient; ambivalent in nature in that they can be passive or active; steadfast and eternal; but for the most part remaining uninvolved in the changes of historical circumstances; able to create things by the power of thought or words or through supernatural agents who are under their control. Their tendency to withdraw to transcendent heights may have resulted from the worship of ancestors, nature, and other spirits or minor divinities who were closer to hand.\textsuperscript{15}

Melanesians have traditionally been aware of the existence of Supreme Beings in some way or another as distinct from the spirits of their dead ancestors and other spirits. Their common involvement with the people brings them into relationship with each other. The Supreme Beings are autonomous creative spirits responsible for the environment in which their communities live. The belief in Supreme Beings can no longer be said to originate from the worship of the soul associated with primal religion or 'a rational elaboration of simpler and earlier religious notions' as E. B. Tylor proposed.\textsuperscript{16} According to Eliade, the belief in the sky hierophany and Supreme Beings was a real part of first or primal peoples' lives. In this reappraisal, considering signs of their being obscured over centuries, they earlier represented the very centre of any group's life, and not just a small subsection on the periphery as they are in traditional religions among indigenous peoples today. Thus, Eliade writes:

\begin{quote}
The present scant worship of these sky gods indicates purely and simply that the mass of religious practice is given over to other religious forms; in no case does it indicate that such sky gods are the abstract creations of primitive man (or simply his 'priests'), or that he has not had been able to have any religious relationship with them. . . . [T]he lack of worship indicates mainly the absence of any religious calendar; occasionally sporadically, each of these supreme sky beings is honoured with prayers, sacrifices, and so on. Occasionally they even have a real cult.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

What Eliade described is perhaps reflected in the way Melanesians have carried over their traditional mentality towards the Supreme Beings into their relationship with the Christian God in two ways. One, at the village level, where tradition remains strong, the people call on their ancestors for their daily needs; only when everything else fails, they pay an exclusive attention to God. To illustrate, a young woman from the shark-

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 166-1667.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 174.
\textsuperscript{17} Eliade, Patterns, 55.
worshipping island of Malaita in the Solomon Islands, travelling in a canoe heard her father (who claimed to be a Christian) speaking to the sharks swimming by their canoe to protect and care for them. The story of Sir Maori Kiki, believing in God, but calling on his dead mother first in times of danger instead of God, mentioned in chapter two of this thesis, is another clear example of this kind of thinking. Two, it is reflected in the way Melanesians offer prayers to their ancestors and to the Christian God simultaneously. What has been discussed so far offers a hermeneutical key for Christian understanding of ancestral beliefs and practices in Melanesia.

To take this argument a step further, we can say that, for the Melanesians, the belief in the ancestral spirits and the belief in the Supreme Being belong to each other. For the Melanesians, the spirit world and the natural world make up one holistic entity. The Melanesian ancestors had lived with this kind of consciousness all the time. They saw God, or the Supreme Being, in the nature around them, and in the experiences they had of Him in their lives.

In his study on the ‘Formation of the Nineteenth-Century Missionary World-view: The Case of James Chalmers’, Hitchen shows how seriously the early missionaries applied themselves to the study of the Pacific Islands people’s cultures as their theological framework for the presentation of the Gospel. Only insensitive mission workers missed the point of doing this. It was a necessity for most missionaries because they believed God used the people’s cultural frame of reference to prepare them for the coming of the Gospel. They had been prepared for the Gospel, because God has been witnessing to Himself in their own, in fact all, cultures. Let us consider various other aspects of this Praeparatio Evangelica.

3:2:2 Preparatory Dreams

Dreams are another cultural phenomenon through which God prepared the people for the coming of Christian missions. Dreams are viewed as the voice of the unconscious or the voice of the soul’s depth. Important or serious dreams are believed to come from the deep world of the spirit, or the ancestors. ‘Dreams are the voice of the unconscious,

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18 Hazel Nate, who came from the Malaita island, and for 12 years was a faculty member of the Christian Leaders’ Training College at Banz, near Mount Hagen, in the Western Highlands of Papua New Guinea, related this experience in an interview with her in June, 1996.
19 Narokobi, ‘What is Religious Experience for a Melanesian?’ in which he speaks about his father praying, ‘the Hail Mary and chanted appeasement to the spirits’, in Knight (ed.), Christ in Melanesia, 11, and in May (ed.), A Reader, 76.
20 Hitchen, ‘Tamate’, 769-774, and Appendix J.
and their message is very important, certainly in what might be called important dreams. . . . The primitive mind fears dreams in the same way that we fear God; a voice from the unknown.\textsuperscript{21} To primal people, dreams are a real part of their lives. Just as people move from place to place when they are awake and have conversations with others, so, in dreams, the people enter the spirit world and have audience with the spirits of the departed, or with gods;

An animist believes that the soul is as real as the body, and it fulfils its role on nocturnal visits, engaging in astral travel during dreams. According to the cosmology of the people the soul has the ability to descend or ascend to the abode of the spirits, or elsewhere, even to distant planets.\textsuperscript{22}

There have been cases where some young men heard their ancestors speaking to them in dreams telling them to enter the Christian ministry.\textsuperscript{23} Through dreams the ancestors prepared the community for the coming of the Gospel, and a subsequent conversion experience. Hitchen has recorded two examples of this in relation to the arrival of James Chalmers at Ioka in the Gulf of Papua in the 1880s, and the arrival of Baptist missionaries at Telefolmin in the late 1940s.\textsuperscript{24} The arrival of James Chalmers in Ioka, according to the oral tradition Diane Langmore collected, reads:

Long ago a man dreamed about a white man. In that dream a man said to him, sometime you will be watching on the beach and a man will come to you. He will bring you good tools to use for the garden and to change your minds with. His skin will be different to yours. Then in the morning, he got up from the bed and told the Eravo people about his dream. The man's name was Koeta Lorou. The first one came to our village, we called his name Tamate. . . . [S]ome of them said to one another, this is not a true man, he is the spirit of a dead body. Then Koeta said to these people, no, this is the man I dreamed before. So that man made a good friend to Mr. Tamate.\textsuperscript{25}

The arrival of the Baptist missionaries in 1948 in Telefolmin was specifically dreamed about by a respected elder when he saw:

a light-skinned, different kind of person would appear carrying something in his hand from which he instructed the people in a new way — the new way for which

\textsuperscript{21} Matthew Kelty, 'Dreams and Visions and Voices', in Knight (ed.), Christ in Melanesia, 16.
\textsuperscript{22} Philip M. Steyne, Gods of Power: A Study of the Beliefs and Practices of Animists (Houston, Texas: Torch Publications, 1960), 126. It needs to be noted that astral travel is also a phenomenon in which a person consciously takes leave of his or her body and goes out on a journey with good or bad intention.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 125.
\textsuperscript{24} Hitchen, 'Dreams in the Traditional Thought and in the Encounter With Christianity in Melanesia', Unpublished Postgraduate Seminar Paper, Religious Studies Department, University of Aberdeen, 1980), 16.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 15.
the people had yearned for many generations. When the missionaries arrived teaching from the Bible, they were welcomed as the fulfilment of this dream. More recently, during a religious revival period at Telefolmin, a team of women evangelists decided to take the Gospel to a village three days walking from their area, where the people had not heard the Gospel. The women fearfully ascended to the village from the river below on the third day, yet believing that God was with them – they were warmly welcomed by the chief of the village, who had come out to meet them. The chief told them that he knew of their coming because the previous night in a dream he was told of their arrival. The chief then told them to share the important message they brought for his people. After the women shared the Gospel with them, many people decided to become Christians. During the meeting an old man sang a hymn about the light of Jesus which had come to them. In his song he encouraged the people to open their hearts and receive the message. These examples are sufficient to show how dreams have prepared Melanesians for the new era. As Steyne observed, ‘dreams are ways to receive messages, communication from the spirit world to the human world, a two-way communication between the living and the dead, and between the living and the gods.' Melanesian ancestral heritage provides important themes, such as belief in the Supreme Being as a seed for developing a full and meaningful understanding of Christianity.

3:2:3 The World Around Pointed the People to the Existence of God

Belief in a Supreme Being provided the first peoples with the possibility of believing in the existence of the true God from the perspective of the spirit world. The physical environment surrounding the people also pointed them to the possibility of believing in the existence of the true God prior to the incarnation and the coming of the Gospel through the missionaries on the basis of Romans 1 and 2:

Historically, biblically, and theologically this position is not without foundation. There was a long period between creation and the time of Abraham, when all that was available was general revelation and personal encounters with God. We read about God’s call of Abraham in Ur of the Chaldeans, for example, when he had neither a Bible nor Jesus. During the same period there appeared in Canaan a priest of the Most High called Melchizedek. About 500 years later, when the

26 Ibid., 16.
27 Josie Bungscp shared this information in her testimony at the CLTC graduates' refresher course held in Anguganeck, West Sepik, Papua New Guinea, in 1988.
children of Israel were approaching the promised land, they met a prophet of God called Balaam, who could communicate with God and see an angel, and was living in the midst of a wicked and corrupt society that God deemed worthy of annihilation (Num 22-24).^{29}

The two significant aspects in Romans chapters 1 and 2 in relation to God and the Melanesians, prior to the incarnation of Christ, are God’s general revelation through nature, and intimations of His law in the heart and conscience of humankind.

Creation reveals God’s eternal power and His divine nature (Rom 1:20). Even though God has made Himself known through creation, in evangelical Christian understanding this knowledge nevertheless is insufficient for mankind to have an intimate relationship with God on two grounds:

Firstly, humans have deliberately turned against God, and they ‘suppress the truth by their wickedness’ (Rom 1:18), because their thoughts became ‘futile’ and their hearts ‘darkened’ (Rom 1:21). However, the wickedness of the human heart cannot stop the God of grace and absolute power from revealing Himself to anyone He chooses. When God takes the initiative, no human being can stand in His way, even when His actions remain unexplainable.

The second thing is that, while creation reveals God’s glory, it does not reveal His saving grace as has been revealed in Jesus Christ. The law of conscience mentioned in Rom 2:12 is the Ten Commandments by which God will judge the Gentiles and the Jews. Although the Gentiles do not have the written Ten Commandments, Paul’s argument runs, God has written these laws on their conscience by giving them the knowledge of good and evil, right and wrong. In places like Melanesia, with a strong sense of community solidarity, conscience is both a personal and a community matter, and is the inner voice that gives a sense of right and wrong, based on experience.^{30}

From a Christian theological point of view, it has been a common insistence that faithfulness in doing what God requires on the basis of the written law, or the voice of conscience, is ‘not the grounds on which men are accepted by God’.^{31} However, Peter’s words about Cornelius (Acts 10:34-35) present a contrary view to what Bruce has suggested, ‘I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism, but accepts

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people from every nation who fear Him and do what is right’. Nevertheless, when Bruce’s statement, ‘accepted by God’ is to be understood as ‘are saved by God’, this agrees with the rest of the Cornelius narrative, because the Holy Spirit came down on the household of Cornelius, after God’s saving event, manifested in Christ was explained to Cornelius and those gathered in his house (Acts 10:36-43). This agrees with Paul’s statement that God accepts every person, Jew or Gentile, on the basis of faith alone (Rom 1:17). But, according to the Old Testament and Hebrews chapter 11, faith existed before the coming of Christ. According to Hebrews 11 God accepted the Old Testament saints on the basis of their faith in Him. It is possible therefore to say that there were Melanesian ancestors who on the basis of their knowledge of the existence of God had faith in this God and were accepted by Him.

The above statement does not alter the fact that Melanesian ancestors, like all ancestors, had equal opportunity to find God through the witness of creation, and that of their conscience, but due to the futility of their minds and the darkness of their hearts, they turned to worship the ancestors rather than the Supreme Being. Thus, from the Pauline viewpoint, Melanesian ancestors and the communities, like their counterparts in other parts of the world, came under the wrath of God as a consequence, because the very creation they worshipped condemned them for failing to see God’s intention in it. Creation is like a signpost that directs human beings to God. The concern of Romans chapters 1 and 2 is that God desires to be known, loved, and served. Ultimately, of course, the prerogative belongs to God to unfold Himself when, how, and to whom He chooses so to do:

It belongs to God to reveal Himself when and how He will. If He reveals Himself to one nation more fully than to another, that belongs to God’s ‘management of His household’ (Eph 1:10); and to one person more fully than to another, we cannot in view of the fact of history, ascribe it altogether to a special responsiveness in those for the time specially favoured. It was not for the lack of trying that ‘in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God’ (1Cor 1:21), nor was it as the reward of a great spiritual effort on the part of Israel as a nation that God was specially revealed to it.32

But various issues of general revelation and general knowledge of the divine still remain. There is a renewed interest among Biblical scholars in the question of original revelation available to humankind, which most primal religions of today reflect and remember in their myths. Westermann has based his commentary on Genesis chapters

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1-11 on primeval stories for meaningful exegetical understanding, because, in one way or another, all religions are concerned with primeval happenings like Genesis 1-11:

When we turn to the pre-history of what the Bible has to say about creation and primeval time, we are struck by the vast richness of stories in this area. They all share a common interest in the origins of our present world. There are stories of creation of every kind of sin or misdemeanour which have, as their consequence, deficiencies and limitations in human life; there are stories of the origin of death, or great universal catastrophes, of difference of languages and of the scattering of the nations; stories, too, of the most important cultural achievements, and of human alienation from God or the gods. Other motifs could be added, others unravelled; there are so many links between them, and they occur with the most diverse colourings. Nevertheless one can be certain that there was a definite circle of motifs at hand.\(^\text{33}\)

Some people would react to these suggestions of a more general awareness of God. Anderson, for one, criticized Westermann in his reviews of Westermann’s work saying, among other things:

Are phenomenological data from the most-widely separated areas (e.g. South Australia, China, Africa, American Indians) relevant for the exegesis of biblical texts whose immediate setting is the history of Israel in the cultural context of the ancient Near East?; and ‘whether the exegetical insight is necessarily dependent upon a traditio-historical hypothesis about the pre-history of the present text.’\(^\text{34}\)

For the purpose of the present study, however, it needs to be underlined that, unless we take seriously the traditio-historical contexts in which the peoples live around the world today, the biblical text, unrelated to their cultural contexts, will remain hanging in the air, offering very little hope for their day-to-day living. The context in which peoples live, including their cosmologies, is the soil in which the Gospel seed needs to be effectively planted.

Cosmology is not the Gospel. It is not the core of the proclamation, not the revealed truth of human existence. But cosmology certainly determines how that message can be spoken, and how heard. It is not the Word made flesh, it is its cradle. But it is a very important cradle. It is not a matter of indifference that the New Testament proclamation was couched in the language, thought-forms, and concepts of the Greco-Roman world, even as it poured new and finally shattering contents into them. At one level, Christian evangelists sought only to convert people, but at another, they sought to claim an epoch, to take captive an entire culture, to mediate a new way of seeing the world. They accomplished

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these objectives so thoroughly that the question of cosmology could be dropped from the theological agenda for 1,500 years. The Gospel has become its own cosmology. With the rise of the world-view of scientific materialism, however, that cosmology became firstly problematic, then dubious, and finally unintelligible. And because the gospel had become indistinguishable from the cosmology in which it was couched, it faced compound difficulties in addressing the whole life of modern people meaningfully.\textsuperscript{35}

This lengthy quotation demonstrates the fact that to understand and interpret Biblical passages correctly it is necessary to know the Biblical cosmology on which the message of each book is based. On the other hand, as Anderson highlights, it is possible to do Biblical exegesis without knowing anything about the pre-history of the texts concerned. Furthermore, cultural similarities do not, by themselves, offer us the freedom to accept some Biblical stories as affirming specific cultural practices (polygamy, human sacrifices, etc.).

Some Biblical stories, such as the call of Moses, show that God chose a natural phenomenon to show Himself as ‘I am who I am’ (Ex 3:14). In this encounter, God appeared to Moses as the God of his ancestors (Ex 3:6). The ‘God of your father’ represented God’s covenant with the patriarchs with a view to the establishment of a community, the occupation of a land, and the development of the people’s faith.

The God of the Father is not attached to a shrine, but is designated by the name of the Patriarch with whom He has a special relation. . . . He is not a local deity, but the patron of the clan. . . . The election motif running through the Patriarchal histories was native to the religion of the Fathers, and, though naïvely nuanced by later Yahwistics features, was not a theme simply read back into primitive tradition. The special traits of the cult of the Patriarchal gods in fact anticipated, at a number of points, characteristics of the religion of Yahweh, the Lord of covenant and community. These provide continuity between the old religious forms and the new, a historically credible background for emergent Yahwism, and an explanation of the development of a religious unity of apparently disparate clans which came together in the Yahwistic league.\textsuperscript{36}

When Jacob established a covenant with Laban his uncle and his father-in-law, their covenant was sealed in the presence, or in the name of, the God of their ancestors, ‘May the God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, and the God of their father judge between us’ (Gen 31:53). The God of their ancestors is the same God whom Laban referred to as the God of Jacob’s father, ‘but last night the God of your father said to me, ‘Be careful


\textsuperscript{36} Frank M. Cross, \textit{Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of Religion of Israel
not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad” (Gen 31:29). God first spoke these words to Laban in a dream the night before (31:24). Jacob on his part testified to the goodness and power of this God who protected Laban from being mean to him, ‘If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been with me, you would surely have sent me away empty-handed. But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands, and last night He rebuked you’ (Gen 31:42).

Jean-Marc Heimerdinger has pointed out that in the Ancient Near East, where Abraham lived, there were many gods. From within this cultural context the true God chose to reveal Himself to Abraham as his ‘personal God’.37 Jacobsen, who first coined the phrase, ‘personal God’, maintains that the term describes ‘a person’s own and special god, who stands in a very close relationship to him, and who ensures that his actions will succeed, indeed, that his whole life will be a success.’38 The title ‘personal god’, is used more to describe relationship, ‘belonging of an individual to a particular god’, rather than ‘existing as a person’.39 An individual’s personal god is that individual’s ‘procreator’, that individual’s ‘father’, or ‘mother, in the case of a goddess’.40 In Jacobsen’s view, a personal god, portrayed by ‘the imagery of parents and child’, coloured the religious concept of the Mesopotamian region in the ‘second millennium, and subsequently influenced the whole of the Ancient Near East’.41 This can be summarized as, ‘[t]he individual matters to God, God cares about him personally and deeply.’42

This is perhaps the reason for Laban’s deep distress over his ‘household gods’. Prior to their departure from Padan Aram we read, ‘Rachel stole her father's household gods’ (Gen 31:30). Laban charged Jacob with the unlawful act, ‘But why did you steal my gods?’ (Gen 31:30). So, as well as believing in the true God, it would appear that the people of Padan Aram, Jacob’s great ancestors also had family or personal gods they consulted with. Like the Melanesians, the Aramaeans, Abraham’s ancestors, found it necessary to have gods close at hand as their family gods, as well as the overall God.

41 Ibid., 43.
42 Ibid., 43.
What their relationship to this overall God was, we are not told except that He communicated with them at different times, as indicated above. It was from within this kind of faith environment that God called Abraham to a faith pilgrimage. The point to consider is if God chose to communicate with the Aramaeans, who also held to their ‘household gods’, could He have not also communicated with the Melanesians long before the first missionaries set foot on the islands?

Knowing about God, or having a personal relationship with Him through faith, are two different matters. Both Laban and Jacob, in the passages cited above, refer to God as the God of their ancestors. This suggests that perhaps they did not have a personal relationship with God. So far as Jacob is concerned, however, his wrestling with ‘someone’ by the brook of Jabbok became that personal or spiritual encounter with God. The change of his name signifies changed personality or character: ‘Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome’ (Gen 32:28). Names represent character, thus Jacob the cheater becomes Israel the prince of God. Further to this is the fact that the man who wrestled with Jacob blessed him, ‘Then the man blessed him there’ (Gen 32:29). Concerning Abraham’s encounter with Melchizedek we read, ‘the one who blesses is greater than the one who is blessed’ (Heb 7:7). The imparting of blessing is the giving of oneself to the recipient of the blessing, ‘it is God turning full-face to the recipient (cf. Nu 6:24-26) in self-giving (Acts 3:26)’. Thus, in addition to the change of character, Jacob is endowed with the presence and character of a supernatural being. The naming of the place of contest gives one more clue to Jacob’s encounter with God, ‘So Jacob called the place Peniel’, saying, ‘It is because I saw God face-to-face, and yet my life was spared’ (Gen 32:30). The climax of the encounter left Jacob with a permanent reminder, ‘The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip’ (Gen 32:31). As a changed person, Jacob is now dependent on his God for the rest of his life. The story of Abraham and his descendants shows that God cannot be kept away from any group of people because of their religious practices. God meets the people where they are, with their sets of belief and practices, and gradually leads them into becoming His people.

43 The narrative speaks of Jacob wrestling with a man (Gen 32:24), but Jacob explained the experience as an encounter with God (Gen 32:30).
44 The quote is from the Good News Bible (GNB).
46 Emphasis mine.
That God was actively at work in the world is clearly stated in the fourth Gospel. Concerning the incarnation, John states ‘He was in the world, though the world was made through Him, the world did not know Him’ (1:10). The incarnation, which is God’s self-manifestation in human flesh, does not mean that God has not already been active in the world He created. In his prologue, John calls Jesus the logos of God. In Greek thought, logos represents ‘the principle of reason or order immanent in the universe, the principle which imposes form on the material world, and constitutes the rational soul in man’.\(^4\) Bruce believes John’s thought is influenced more by the Hebrew concept than the Greek. ‘The “word of God” in the Old Testament denotes God in action, especially in creation, revelation, and deliverance’.\(^4\) Scholars have linked the logos concept with Old Testament passages dealing with the activity of God’s word. In Genesis 1:1ff, ‘God said’ can be expressed, as in Psalm 33:6, 9, ‘By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; for He spoke, and it came to be.’\(^4\) Part of the activities of the logos or the wisdom of God which John gives to Jesus, is to manifest Himself to human beings in terms of their cultural frame of reference (Rom 1:20). Since Jesus, as the logos or the wisdom of God, was in the world before He became a human being, it is possible that He revealed Himself to Melanesians as Asisi, Yakali, Oga Nukuk, Hagoro, Kaia, and many more.

Speaking about the unknown God of the Athenians, the apostle Paul declared: ‘Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you’ (Acts 17:23).\(^5\) Paul identified the God the Athenians worshipped in ignorance as the very


\(^{5}\) Scholars have different opinions about the address. Schweitzer thinks Paul uses a Stoic form of mysticism of a pantheistic nature, rather than the particular predestination mysticism of the genuine form of the world that sees God being transcendent and supernatural. According to Schweitzer, the Areopagus address is non-historical because there never was an altar to the unknown God. There were altars to unknown gods in the plural form but none in the singular; cited in N. B. Stonehouse, *The Areopagus Address* (London: Tyndale Press, 1949), 6. Dibelius thinks Paul uses Hellenistic thought forms to speak about the true knowledge of God, which God has made available to all humankind, cited in Myrtle S. Langley, ‘Paul in Athens, Pseudophilosophy or Proclamation?: A Missiologival Study of Acts 17:16-34’ (Selly Oak, Birmingham: Growther Hall, unpublished, 1980), 4. Norden considers the address to be a ‘religious propaganda discourse’ *Ibid.*, 5; Schmidt considers it to be a guarded Christian message and an attack on paganism, *Ibid.*, 5. Langley believes the speech is Luke’s edited version of Paul’s message, and is an address based on primary sources, speaking to ‘different groups of people at one and the same time, to some extent playing one off against the other . . . employs Greek concept and language, perhaps borrowed from Jewish-Diaspora preaching or theology’, *Ibid.*, 5. For Bertil Gartner, the address represents a ‘Christian adaptation of Jewish-Diaspora preaching, the quotations and allusions from Greek literature being in this tradition rather
God he came to proclaim to them. In other words, the God Jesus came to reveal, and for that matter, Jesus Himself, is none other than the God the Athenians worshipped,

Here is the God of Biblical revelation: Paul allows no distinction between a Supreme Being and a Demiurge who fashioned the material world. And this God, who is creator of all, and universal Lord, is introduced in language strongly reminiscent of the Old Testament scriptures.51

Unlike idols made of gold, silver and stone, the 'Unknown God' is dependent on no one. He is the all-sufficient God. The heathens recognized the all-sufficient nature of this God ... even the higher paganism had realized that no material house could accommodate the divine nature.'52

For Paul, the 'Unknown God' is the creator of all things, including mankind, from whom all receive life and breath – the totality of their existence (Acts 17:25).53 The 'unknown God' in reality is the Lord of heaven and earth – God of the universe, one who 'does not live in temples built by hands' (Acts 17:25). This 'unknown God' is in fact the source and sustainer of 'every nation of men' (Acts 17:26), and the father of all (Acts 17:29). This truth underlines common universal brotherhood with one human ancestor. Since all human beings descended from the one human ancestor, the 'unknown God' must be seen as the great ancestor of all the nations, or the ancestor of

52 Ibid., 357. As an example, Bruce quotes Euripides, Fragment 968: 'What house built by craftsmen could enclose the form divine within enfolded walls?' Ibid., n. 41, page 357. But as Bruce further points out, 'the affinities of the terms here used by Paul are Biblical rather than classical', Ibid., 357.

53 Some scholars make no allowance for the possibility that even pagans like Melanchsins, in their ignorance, might have worshipped the true God. David J. Williams writes, 'Of course there was no connection between this god and the God whom he (Paul) would proclaim. He was not suggesting for one moment that they were unconscious worshippers of the true God but was simply looking for a way of raising with them the basic question of all theology: “Who is God?”', Acts: New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990), 305. The fact that Paul went on in almost the same breath to speak about the biblical God, after saying, 'Now what you worship as something unknown, I am going to proclaim to you', would contradict William's statement. I. Howard Marshall agrees with Williams, 'There was, to be sure, no real connection between an unknown god and the true God; Paul hardly meant that the audience were unconscious worshippers of the true God, rather he is drawing their attention to the true God who was ultimately responsible for the phenomenon which was attributed to an unknown god', The Acts of the Apostles (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), 286. If the true God was responsible for the phenomenon of the unknown god, would He not allow these people to worship Him unknowingly? Robert L. Cate is more to the point when he writes, 'Paul was well aware of the many idols the Athenians worshipped, yet “[n]e used their idolatry as the basis for beginning his sermon of God as Creator and Redeemer”, in much the same way as the Old Testament writers did', Old Testament Roots for New Testament Faith (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1982), 87. Whether Paul intended the reference to the ‘unknown god’ as merely a point of contact, or as a hint that he was now disclosing the reality behind their only partial worship, can clearly be debated. The biblical reference is ambivalent. Paul's conception of God is clearly of one who is actively involved, and who excludes the efforts of all people.
all ancestors. If this idea is true then we can say that all human beings have one common human ancestor and one divine ancestor.

As the Ancestor of all ancestors, this God took the initiative in determining the places and the climatic conditions for the people to live in (Acts 17:26). The purpose for doing this is 'that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out to Him and find Him' (Acts 17:27). The 'unknown God' the Athenians sought to reach out to is one some of their poets had spoken about, 'As some of your poets have said, "We are His offspring" ' (Acts 17:28). Paul is not afraid to identify the God he proclaimed with the one the Athenian poets had spoken about. As the God of the entire universe, the ancestor of all ancestors, this 'unknown God', whom Paul elsewhere calls the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the God of the Athenians, the Melanesians, and 'every nation of humans'.

The burden of Paul's heart is that this 'unknown God' has made Himself known to all human beings 'by the man He has appointed' (verse 32), that is, Jesus Christ whom He has raised from the dead (verse 31). The arrival of Jesus Christ signalled the end of the past when God overlooked human ignorance (verse 30), and the dawning of a new day, 'now He commands all people everywhere to repent' (verse 30). This means the worship of all idols and false unknown gods must give way to the worship of the man God has appointed.

The message for Melanesians is now clear: all worship of sharks, snakes, crocodiles, and human skulls, the practice of magic, witchcraft, and sorcery must be put away; every person must repent of these practices carried out in ignorance. No plea for ignorance will be taken! The 'unknown God' has made Himself known in His appointed man, Jesus Christ. God has raised Him from the dead, and has given to Him all authority in heaven and on the earth to judge the living and the dead on the day that God has appointed (verse 31).

As mentioned above, in pre-Christian days, Melanesians, as well as believing in their human ancestors and other spirits, often were conscious of the existence of a great

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54 Scholars are uncertain whether 'times' and 'places' are to be seen as 'periods of history or periods of times' (seasons) by the use of the words kairos and oroghtias, Ibid., 11. For discussions concerning various preferences see: Bertil Gartner, The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation (Uppsala: Almqist & Wiksells, 1955), 149-152 and various commentaries on the texts. Paul seems to be using double meanings and Jewish and Hellenistic thought forms for the many statements he makes in this speech. The commentaries on the texts deal with these issues, but they are beyond the scope of this work to deal with them one-by-one.

55 Cf. Rom 1:15; 1 Cor 1:3; Eph 1:3.
and powerful Spirit they related to by different names. When the ancestors and other spirits failed to meet their need, as Paul found out among the Athenians, the Melanesians called out to this great and powerful Spirit under different names. This is one reason for saying that God was in Melanesia long before the Melanesian occupation of the islands, and the arrival of the missionaries.

God was in Melanesia long, long before the Melanesians came, let alone the white missionaries. But the question as to whether the general revelation (as it stood before the actual arrival of the Gospel) was adequate for Melanesians to believe in God, and might have actually led them to worship God 'truly' is a debatable one. Several basic questions need to be asked here: Why did God leave the Melanesians for so long before sending the white missionaries? Did God not care that my ancestors might perish? Romans (chapters 1 and 2) tells us that those who turn against God, deliberately rejecting the knowledge they received through general revelation, are without excuse on the Day of Judgment. Does not this imply a definite point of moral choice? If rejection leads to adverse judgment, is it not clear that acceptance leads to salvation?\(^{56}\)

God was indeed in Melanesia through His general revelation in creation. As Stott observes, 'The creation is the visible disclosure of the invisible God, an intelligible disclosure of the otherwise unknown God.'\(^{57}\) Creation brings God and humanity close to each other, so Paul in his Acropolis speech could say, 'For in Him we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28). Romans 1 and 2 contain talk of natural revelation, which is different from natural theology or belief. Natural theology is about humanity coming to know God on their own, without any help from God or the Bible.\(^{58}\) Natural theology or doctrine implies that, 'it is possible for human beings, through nature, to come to know God, and that therefore as the way to God, creation is an alternative to Christ.'\(^{59}\) The discourse of natural revelation, by contrast, makes humanity aware of God’s power, wisdom, and order, but cannot perfectly and fully make God known to them, as His specific revelation in Christ alone can.\(^{60}\) So far as the theology of ancestors

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56 Maeliau, 'Melanesian Way of Worship', 123.
59 Stott, Romans, 74.
60 Stott mentions four general characteristics which distinguish specific revelation from general revelation. 1. General revelation is for everybody, specific revelation is for specific people, through Christ and the Bible. 2. General revelation is through the natural order, specific revelation is through the incarnation of Christ, and the inspiration of the Scriptures. 3. General revelation is a continuous, day-by-day creation, and continues to reveal, specific revelation is 'final' and 'finished' through Christ, and in the Scriptures. 4. General revelation reveals God's glory through creation, special revelation reveals God's 'salvific grace in Christ', Ibid., 73.
is concerned, God’s self-disclosure in nature made the Melanesian ancestors and the communities conscious of a Being far more powerful than them.

There are then, good biblical, theological, and cultural grounds to support the position that Melanesians had a valid, though partial, knowledge of God before the missionaries arrived and proclaimed Christ to them. From the Biblical perspective, there is the evidence that God cares for the nations as much as He does for Israel (Dt 2:5ff; Amos 9:7). God’s gracious activity extends to individuals outside the boundaries of Israel – to Melchizedek, Balaam, and Jethro, and beyond. In the New Testament, this is well illustrated by the encounter between Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10:23-48). Until Peter arrived at the home of Cornelius, he had not understood the vision he saw at Joppa (Acts 10:9-16). The fact is that God accepted the Gentiles before Peter did, ‘I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism, but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right’ (Acts 10:34-5). The statement, ‘who fear Him and do what is right’ refers ‘not only to those who through faith keep the commandments of the Old Testament, but also those who trust and obey God to the extent of the revelation they have’. 61

It is possible, therefore, to argue that, in Melanesia, the belief and practice of ancestor worship prepared the people for the coming of the missionaries. The great Supreme Being or the great spirit, can, accordingly, be regarded as the great ancestral spirit, or the ancestor of all ancestors, which for many communities, is the traditional Melanesian equivalent of the God of the Bible. It needs to be noted, however, that different attitudes exist in different communities about identifying the God of the Bible with names associated with traditional spirits. In the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea, the Kâte speaking community has gladly adopted the term Anutu, originating from Austronesian languages for God, whilst the Yagaria-speaking community uses the term ‘Goti’, for God, to avoid the intrusion of pagan ideas. 62 In the future, the Yagaria speakers might use Ube for God, a term the Lutheran church workers have started using. In pre-Christian history, the term was applied to the creator totem responsible ‘for the origin of certain things or groups of people’. 63 A word that is most commonly used by the Yagaria speakers is Souve, denoting ‘the big man who took

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61 Ibid., 254.
63 Ibid., 64.
initiative in war. The name Anulu has been adopted by some language groups in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea for God.

The examples cited here show that the theology of ancestors in Melanesia is one which reaches beyond the living and the dead ancestors to a Supreme Being, or a great Spirit known by different names in different communities. There are, at the same time, communities which do not have a name for such a Supreme Being. These people refer to Him simply as the one who is above, or father who is above. By pointing the community to the Supreme Being, the ancestors made the community seek after Him for the help and assistance which the ancestors were not able to give to the people. This is part of what Trompf calls, 'praeparatio evangelica'.

3:3 MELANESIAN ANCESTRAL HERITAGE, CHRISTIANITY AND CHRISTENDOM

The foregoing discussion shows that Melanesians were religiously and culturally prepared for the coming of the Gospel. Under the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit again, the missionaries have achieved the task of propagating the Gospel most remarkably. All over Melanesia today, the church building, a visible symbol of the people’s faith, characterizes every village. From the people’s perspective, the church building is the equivalent of their traditional feast hut – kawo va as the Maisin call it – the cultural ultimate of the clan or village power, the centre of peace and friendship. Other communities see the church building as the meeting place of the living and the living-dead, the visible meeting the invisible, the living community in union with the departed ancestors. Christianity has become the religion of ‘the people of the land’ and ‘the chiefs’. Many are prepared to defend it if anyone seeks to speak against it. The people view Christianity as the seat of their survival, something they value very highly.

In spite of the great advancement of Christianity in Melanesia, on the other hand, many people still regard Christianity as foreign, or as white people’s religion. The

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64 Ibid., 65.
65 This is the way the Sentanians refer to the Christian God. This could be due to Christian influence.
66 Trompf, Melanesian Religion, 29.
70 Kaplan, ‘Christianity’, 128, 140-144.
71 Ibid., 190.
aspects of foreignness of the Gospel will now be discussed. In order to clarify the foreignness of the Gospel, use may be made of the distinction between Christianity and Christendom. ‘Christianity’, Whiteman contends, ‘is a belief system rooted in the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth’, whilst, in contrast, ‘Christendom is a Western cultural tradition, influenced pervasively by the Christian religion, but not identical nor synonymous with it.’

I suggest that Christianity and Christendom both carry aspects of the foreignness of the Gospel. These two points are discussed below under two headings: Melanesian Ancestral Heritage and Christianity, and Melanesian Ancestral Heritage and Christendom.

3:3:1 Melanesian Ancestral Heritage and Christianity

The statement, ‘Christianity is rooted in the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth’, is still loaded with foreign concepts for Melanesians. The terms, ‘Christianity’, ‘Jesus’, and ‘Nazareth’, have no historical connections with Melanesians. Christianity is a foreign belief system, different from Melanesian traditional religion. It carries an air that leads to suspicion and confusion. As a belief system, it was imported into Melanesia by missionaries. The name Jesus does not feature in any traditional Melanesian family genealogy. It is a foreign name to Melanesians.

There was no place called Nazareth anywhere in Melanesia prior to the arrival of the Gospel. So the definition of Christianity, meaningful though it is, is loaded with foreign elements.

These aspects of foreignness should not, and must not, be eliminated from the presentation of the Gospel, because they are related to the historical roots of Christianity. These Biblical names were also foreign to the people of Europe when they first heard them. The Biblical faith of the Gospel, rooted in Jesus of Nazareth, brings Christianity into ‘creative, continuous tension’ with various cultures, and thus, with Melanesian traditional faith, rooted in the Melanesian ancestors. This creative, continuous tension between Christianity and Melanesian traditional religion needs to remain to allow Melanesians to make their own assessments about the two belief systems.


73 However, in a personal communication with this author, in January 2004, Grahame C. Martin pointed out that the name ‘Yesu appears in a Suki (WP) family genealogy, neglected in the modern era, but still used in other family names such as Yesubi and Bariyesu.

To reject Christianity because it advocates a foreign or new belief system, with names of people and places unrelated to the Melanesians’ understanding, and, do so without careful assessment, would be irresponsible and damaging to the faith many Melanesians have come to have in Christianity. What Melanesians need to do is to study these foreign names in the context of the Bible to see why they are there. More than this, Melanesians need to study and assess Jesus of Nazareth in relation to their great ancestors, as custodians of their traditional faith, and in relation to their own individual and community lives, to see if Jesus of Nazareth holds any significance for them.

The issue of continuity is an important aspect in the tension between the Gospel and Melanesian ancestral heritage. What needs to happen here is the examination of this tension in relation to the core concepts found in both Melanesian ancestral heritage and the Gospel. In Melanesian ancestral heritage the core concept is the ancestors. So far as Christianity is concerned, Jesus of Nazareth is the core of the Gospel. Thus the Melanesian ancestral heritage and Christianity revolve around the ancestors, and Jesus of Nazareth, respectively. Clarifying questions to be considered here are: ‘Is there a continuity between Melanesian ancestral heritage and Jesus of Nazareth?’ and if so, ‘What is the nature of this continuity?’

3:3:1:1 Melanesian Ancestral Heritage and Jesus of Nazareth

Jesus of Nazareth cannot be understood in isolation from His cosmic significance, His work and words. The works and words of Jesus of Nazareth tell us who He really is. Similarly, Melanesians revere and worship their ancestors because of who they were, and what they did and said. Thus the core of the Gospel, and that of Melanesian ancestral heritage, need to be examined not as intellectual and academic questions, but as a search after meaningful personal and community relationships with Jesus of Nazareth and the ancestors. At the most crucial level, the search is one for meaningful understanding of the relationship between Jesus of Nazareth and Melanesian ancestors. When the relationship between Jesus and the ancestors is established, it in turn becomes the question of how Jesus and the ancestors relate to the community.

Melanesian communities are religious and spiritual communities built on the foundation of the ancestral bones or the life-force of the ancestors. Jesus of Nazareth will remain a foreigner to the Melanesians if we cannot show that His life-force, like that of the ancestors is important for the Melanesians. Melanesian ancestral heritage is
built on the lives, works, and words of the ancestors. Who the ancestors were, and what
they did and said, form the backbone of Melanesian traditional religion. The names of
the ancestors, their achievements, and the words they left behind with the communities,
are the basis for interpersonal relationships between the ancestors and the living
communities.

The life, the achievements, and the words of Jesus of Nazareth are also aimed at
establishing good and meaningful interpersonal relationships. Jesus summed up this
meaningful interpersonal relationship in one pregnant statement; ‘Love the Lord your
God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first
and the greatest commandment. And the second one is like it: Love your neighbour as
yourself. All the Law and the prophets hang on these two commandments’ (Mt 22: 37-
40). The interpersonal relationship Jesus offers takes the people from this world into the
world of the spirit, into a relationship with God, then back into the world of humanity,
into a relationship with the neighbours and self.

Jesus came from heaven to earth to bring sinful human beings into a personal
relationship with an all-holy and all-powerful God. No Melanesian ancestor could ever
take the people to God as Jesus is able to do, because Melanesian ancestors do not know
how to do it. Furthermore, Jesus came into the world to give humanity a new way of
looking at their neighbours and themselves. Jesus established this three-dimensional
relationship on the basis of the quality of His own life, the work He did, and the words
He spoke. Jesus takes humanity from where it is into a new world and a new
relationship.

To ‘love the Lord your God’ with everything a person has demands a personal
relationship with this God. This is a new and foreign concept. The way to this personal
relationship with God is through faith in Jesus of Nazareth, in who He is, and in what
He did and said. Another way of stating this truth is to say no one can know God
without knowing or having a personal relationship with Jesus of Nazareth. Melanesian
ancestral heritage has nothing to say about this kind of relationship. It is a new and
foreign teaching, but one that Melanesians cannot do without. Without this personal
knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth, it is not possible to love our neighbours and ourselves
in the way Jesus meant it. For, apart from our neighbours being our immediate family
and clan relatives, the concept extends to those who belong to other clans and tribes
who may well be our traditional enemies. We are to love these traditional enemy clans
in the way we love ourselves. In other words, we are to treat these people in the way we
love, accept and relate to the people in our family, clan and tribe. Loving our traditional enemies instead of paying back wrong for wrong will bring lasting peace and harmony. This is both radical and foreign, and demands more than Melanesian ancestral heritage can do for the people. It leaves Melanesians helpless in meeting this demand. So the need for Melanesians to have a personal relationship with Jesus of Nazareth becomes unavoidable. Once a person enters into a personal relationship with Jesus of Nazareth through faith, that person needs to declare loyalty to Him through exclusive faith in Him and obedience to Him. Faith in Jesus, and obedience to Him, demand a willingness to walk in the new and foreign ways of God.

The comparison between Melanesian ancestral heritage and Christianity is a comparison between Jesus of Nazareth and Melanesian ancestors who, respectively, constitute the core of the two belief systems. A detailed study of the relationship between Jesus and the ancestors is offered in chapter 5 of this thesis, under the Priesthood of Jesus. We will now look at the relationship between Melanesian ancestral heritage and Christendom.

3:3:2 Melanesian Ancestral Heritage and Christendom
The definition Whiteman offers on Christendom says, 'Christendom is a Western cultural tradition, influenced pervasively by the Christian religion, but not identical nor synonymous with it.' It is common knowledge that in bringing the Gospel to the Melanesian islands missionaries brought Christianity and Christendom as one total package. Today, a great majority of Melanesians who call themselves Christians do so because they have been brought up under the influence of Christendom. Christendom in Melanesia represents the denominational influence the people were brought under: denominational patterns of leadership and administrative structures forced on the people, denominational doctrines and practices relating to forms of worship, baptism, and holy communion, together with the many prohibitions relating to the kind of clothing people should wear, food they should eat, customary social interaction patterns, such as chewing betelnut, smoking, etc., and other moral or ethical practices.

The denominational influence, marked by denominational names in many places, at best confirmed the existing intertribal rivalries, and, at worst, disrupted the social cohesion that bonded the people into solidarity with each other. Whilst the Australian Colonial Administration allocated spheres of influence to the different mission groups to hasten the propagation of the Gospel, it did this arbitrarily, paying very little attention to
the clan and tribal solidarity the people had with each other, which often extended across mountain ranges, valleys, or islands. The division into different spheres of influence divided the people into new 'foreign tribal groups' identified by denominational names. The history of mission shows that although what they saw was bringing light and truth, missionaries came to Melanesia to preach Christ, and to win converts for their denominations. The propagation of Christendom, which went hand in hand with the presentation of Jesus of Nazareth as Saviour and Lord, has confused the people. In the minds of many people, to be a Christian is to belong to a particular denomination, or to follow a certain brand of teaching. The effort to win denominational converts is still being actively pursued today, both by missionaries and Melanesian Christians. The fact that some tribal groups do not want to join any denomination because, in their thinking, Jesus, or Jehovah, or God has always been a member of their tribe, could be attributed to the confusion the people have with the many different denominational teachings they hear.

The process of Christendom was carried out hand in hand with the pacification of the people. What the mission and the government did to bring the people under their control, in some places, all too often was only skin deep, in other places the power of the Gospel the missionaries proclaimed brought deep and real transformation to the lives of the people. Whilst the colonial government brought cannibalism to an end through external force, tribal warfare, the practice of sorcery, magic, and witchcraft have not been wiped out. The process of Christendom and civilization in many areas changed the people on the outside, but the inner core of the people’s life remained unaffected.

The title of Miriam Kahn’s article, ‘Sunday Christian, Monday Sorcerer’, hit the nail on the head. What the Wamira people of Dogura in the Oro Province of Papua New Guinea confided to Kahn could be multiplied all over Papua New Guinea. ‘The foreigners only see the outside of our customs, like the leaves and the branches of a tree. . . . Don’t pay any attention to the fact that we go to church and pray and put up crosses in the cemetery. It is all a lie. Underneath evil persists.’ The practices of magic,

55 Martha Kaplan, ‘Christianity’, 132-139. Ann Chowning, ‘God and Ghost in Kove’, in Barker (ed.), Christianity in Oceania (1990), 42-48. Both Kaplan and Chowning discuss the way the people of Draunini of the island of Veti Levu, and the Kove people of West New Britain, in Papua New Guinea believe their mythical personalities to be Jesus or God, as proclaimed by the missionaries. Consequently, they do not see the need to become Christians because the God they hear about has always been a member of their community.

sorcery, witchcraft, and dependence on the ancestors form the backbone of the Melanesian ancestral heritage. Until transformation takes place at this deep level of people’s lives the process of Christendom will always remain artificial. Tamanabae brings out the contrast of this experience when he speaks of the lives of his people after and before they experienced revival:

They pray to God while hunting and fishing, for their gardens, for their pigs and dogs, and every aspect of their life. Before this, they would go to church, but once they came out of church they would turn to their magic things for hunting, fishing, gardening, etc. Now they look to God for everything – personal and collective needs. For personal needs they pray themselves, but for collective needs they pray in the church."

3:4 MELANESIAN ANCESTRAL HERITAGE, THE WAY OF SALVATION, AND THE GOSPEL

The crucial question of the relationship between Melanesian ancestral heritage and the Gospel will now be discussed. As a tentative statement, the Gospel is defined as ‘the way of salvation’. This tentative definition of the Gospel serves to accommodate the Melanesian ancestral heritage as the Melanesian ‘Gospel’, rooted in the ancestors. ‘Ancestor-worship is the key to the Melanesian system of government.’ The Melanesian ‘Gospel’ or ‘way of salvation’ is encapsulated in their understanding of history, time, space, and the concept of Lo.

3:4:1 History, Time, Space, and Lo Encapsulating the Melanesian ‘Way of Salvation’

3:4:1:1 History as ‘a Way of Salvation’

The community’s understanding of history binds the people to the past and the future, a Melanesian man is endowed with a sense of history, purpose, a set of values, and a vision of the cosmos by which his life is guided. He is given a culture and autonomy within a defined community territorially, and in terms of human relationships. Thus, he is born into a spiritual and religious order. Much of his life is devoted towards the maintenance and promotion of the given order . . . the Melanesian is born to the knowledge that he lives and works within a spirit world. His actions and his omissions are always being watched by the spirit world. . . . Upon his death, the living spirit of the dead lives on as a living person on the horizontal plane [sic].

105.
This understanding of history provides the Melanesians with a sense of well-being, security, and reliance on their ancestors. Melanesians experience their history. They live with it and talk about it with others. When a Melanesian is born, the person is given a name of a departed ancestor at birth, or some time later. The person’s name is his or her history, since this associates the person with his or her ancestor. Birth for the Melanesians is a religious experience, entering into the Melanesian ‘way of salvation’. A newborn child enters the family with the blessing of the ancestors as words of incantations are spoken over the child in the name of the ancestor. The mother, during her labour pains, would have magical words spoken over her as the mid-wife rubs her back with her hands, or gives her water to drink blessed with magic. The Maleu people of West New Britain in Papua New Guinea dedicate the mother and the child to the spirits as soon as the child is born, to protect them from danger and death.\(^{80}\) The name given to the newborn child places the infant in solidarity with past generations. It takes the person back to the root of his or her existence. It gives the person the right to everything associated with that name. The child becomes possessor of the ancestral blessing or ‘way of salvation’. The ancestor whose name the individual takes on becomes the guardian of the person, responsible for the care, protection and safety of the child. Thus it is possible to say the guardian ancestor provides ‘salvation’ to the individual. The Melanesian understanding of salvation through history is, furthermore, directly linked to the community understanding of time and space.

3:4:1:2 Time as ‘a Way of Salvation’

The Melanesian understanding of time is measured by its importance to the community.

The Melanesian is more inclined to measure time, with himself as the reference. . . . Events still remembered belong to ‘living memory time’ and those earlier belong to ‘ancestral time’. The latter stores the people’s values and the mores of the people, and is also the locus of myths, and of the superhuman. Time, for the Melanesian, is not an absolute, because his community takes the centre space. What has meaning to him and to his community has relevance in time. What is outside human in chaos. Time is then relational, in so far as it has meaning to the Melanesian.\(^{81}\)

\(^{80}\) Information provided by George Euling, first-born son of the Chief of the Maleu people, in an interview with him in Port Moresby in May 2001.

As a relational concept, time links the living with their past ancestors. For the people and their community, life began when the first ancestor came to settle on the piece of land the community occupies. Malinowski's observation of the Trobriand Islanders supports this concept of time, and here we see how history can shade into what we term legend and myth, with all these ways of thinking about the past affecting each other.

All these natives do not conceive of a past as of a lengthy duration, unrolling itself in successive stages of time. They have no idea of a long vista of historical occurrences, narrowing down and dimming as they recede towards a distant past, they distinguish whether it happened within their own memory or that of their fathers or not. But, once beyond this line of demarcation, all the past events are placed by them on one plane, and there are no gradations of 'long ago' and 'very long ago'... The mythical personages of the natives' legends live in the houses, eat the same food, handle the same weapons and implements as those in use at present. The mythical personages in the Trobriand tradition are living the same type of life, under the same conditions as the present natives.\[82\]

The legends of the people show that the ancestors, as founders of the community and givers of life, continue to live with their people. By being with the people, they ensure that community well-being passed down by the ancestors remains an ongoing experience for the people. This understanding of time keeps the Melanesian 'way of salvation' within the reach of the people.

The concept of time as Malinowski has presented brings the past and the present close to each other, thus making an important contribution to the search for meaningful life. The time of the ancestors, expressed in Melanesian Pidgin as *taim bilong tumbuna* or *taim bipo*, instead of being something of the forgotten past, remains in front of the people all the time. *Taim bipo* literally means 'time in front', and places the past event, rather than the future one, vividly in front of the people. The future or *taim bihain*, is considered as something at the back of a person, it is invisible, the people cannot see it, it is of no consequence to them. *Taim bilong tumbuna* is often talked about as the time of prosperity, one with abundant supply of food and game in the bush. This was the time when hunters did not have to go too far into the bush to kill animals, when the rivers and the waters teemed with fish and other water creatures. The search for a meaningful life or 'a way of salvation' is a longing to return to, or for the return of, this time of abundance. Thus, future events are explained in the light of the past. In other words, for the Melanesians, the past is their guide for the future (see Figure 2).

To say Melanesians are an 'event-oriented' people, without the above understanding of their concept of time is to miss a crucial concept in Melanesian thinking. The events Melanesians celebrate are directly related to their ancestors, their lives, and achievements. Thus, some of what we can discern of their distinct yearnings are sometimes overlapping notions of history (more recently ancestral days), legend (ancestral hero exploits), and myth (especially primal events).

3:4:1:3 Space as 'a Way of Salvation'

Space, as 'a way of salvation', like history and time, is influenced by the issue of relationship. The environment or the space in which Melanesians live is religious, because everything in it contributes to the life of the community. Space for the Melanesian is both concrete and personal. The well-being of the community, and the richness of the resources, are directly related to the people's relationship with their ancestors. When the community decides to move from one location to another, the people must get the approval of the ancestors. Like many primal people, many Melanesians see the earth as their mother, and themselves as children of the land. Space is important to the Melanesians because of its significance to them and their belief. Sharing of space with the ancestors provides the people with security and continuity of life, a further expression of the Melanesian 'way of salvation'. Kiki

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83 See 'peace-making invocations to the ancestral spirits', told by Lacey from a short play produced by John Waiko, depicting the reluctance of the Binandare people to leave their first settlement without saying goodbye to their ancestors; Roderic Lacey, 'Religious Change in a Pre-colonial Era', Point 2 (1978): 169.


highlights this aspect of community well-being when he talks about their ancestor, Maruka Akore:

When I went hunting, he would guide my hand. When enemies were near, he would protect me from their sight. I shall never forget the day when I first went to help my mother in the garden and she taught me to speak the incantation while I planted my first banana. Biting a piece of sacred bark that she had given me, I said: ‘Maruka Akore, I bite your flesh, I call your name. As I am planting this banana, go into the earth before it, give it power and make it grow.’

3:4:1:4 Lo as ‘a Way of Salvation’

Lo for Melanesians represents the ancestral rules and regulations for individual and community well-being. To live by the Lo of the ancestors is to experience the blessings of the ancestors, or to experience a good relationship with them. On the other hand, to disobey the ancestral Lo is to experience conflict with the spirit order. Instead of power and prosperity, the reverse is what the people experience. The gardens do not produce much, the rain, or wild pigs, destroy the gardens, human health is disturbed, unexplainable events take place. Lo binds the community to the ancestors. It is the basis for the successful operation of rituals. The success of any ritual depends on remembering the words of the formula, the name of the ancestor and the correct procedure to carry it out. The ancestral Lo ensures that set procedures be faithfully adhered to. Good life, community harmony, which for the Melanesians are salvation experiences, are dependent on knowing, remembering, and following the directions of the ancestral Lo.

We have acknowledged on page 22 the many changes which have come into Melanesian societies due to such influences as modernization and Christianization. What is stated here may appear to be idealistic, but when we realize that until the advent of Christianity, the ancestral Lo was the people’s way of salvation.

3:4:1:5 Summary

Melanesian ancestral heritage provides Melanesians with a concept, or a ‘gospel’, as ‘a way of salvation’, encapsulated in the Melanesian understanding of history, time, space, and Lo, in direct relationship with the ancestors. An important observation to be made here is that the way of salvation through Melanesian ancestral heritage is very much community-centred. It originated from within the community, for the good of the

community. It is a human-initiated way of salvation, provided by human beings for human beings. It is a limited way of salvation, because of its tribal orientation. Different tribes in Melanesia have to follow their own way of salvation by observing the laws and regulations put in place by their particular ancestors. This tentative and limited understanding of the way of salvation needs to be placed alongside the Biblical teaching about the Gospel.

3:4:2 The Gospel and Melanesian Concepts or Ways of Salvation

Melanesian ancestral heritage represents a belief-system built on many stories which, over many years, came to be regarded as the traditional belief of the people, centred on the foundation of the ancestors. Christianity, in a similar way to Melanesian ancestral heritage represents a belief-system grown out of many traditions, culminating into one unified tradition, centred in Jesus of Nazareth, who is the heart of the Christian Gospel. According to the four Gospels, the Gospel can be defined as, 'a written work of witness and interpretation by an author expounding the preaching of the church about the public life, death, and exaltation of Jesus'. Taking the entire message of the Bible into account, a more-embracing definition of the Gospel would be, 'The gospel is the good news that God in Jesus Christ has fulfilled His promises to Israel, and that the way of salvation has been opened to all.'

While the first definition about the Gospel stated above refers to the written account in the four Gospels, and the second is concerned with the 'Good News' of who Jesus is and His achievement for human salvation, the two definitions are concretely set in Jesus as the content of the Gospel. In other words, Jesus is the Gospel, which brings salvation to all the people. In relation to Melanesia, Jesus as the Gospel has direct relationship to the history, time, space, and the Law, the four factors discussed under Melanesian ancestral heritage. These points will now be discussed one-by-one in turn.

3:4:2:1 The Gospel as a History of Salvation

Is Jesus a truly historical person? For the Gospel to be a history of salvation, it must be rooted in a historical person. Melanesians believe in, and relate to, their ancestors, because the ancestors were real people, and are still real to their communities, even

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88 R. H. Mounce, 'Gospel', in Douglas, (ed.), The Illustrated Bible Dictionary, 3 vols. (Leicester,
though they have a different mode of existence. The ancestors are important to the people because they have lived with them and shared life with them. If Jesus is to be relevant to Melanesians then He must be someone who has had a real physical existence on planet earth, not a Gnostic or docetic phantom, and not a mythical being who may, or may never, have existed. Jesus, therefore, has to be a genuine human being, a person with flesh and blood, with a place of origin, with a clan, a tribal, and a national identity, a real person, with personal history and achievements.

The concerns raised here need to be clearly answered for the Melanesians. Some recent biblical scholars from the Western world, moreover those whose representatives brought the Gospel to Melanesia, have expressed scepticism about the link with what we can know historically about the Jesus of His times or the early church. Although the early missionaries to Melanesia did not share this scepticism, because the trend belongs to 20th-century rather than 19th-century Christendom, it is possible that some more-recent missionaries have come to Melanesia with these higher-critical views in their minds. Some German scholars belonging to the school of form criticism, represented by such individuals as Albert Schweitzer, Rudolf Bultmann, and to a lesser extent, Karl Barth, to name just a few, in different ways have claimed, 'The living Christ is essentially the Christ of the apostolic proclamation, accessible to us today in a spiritual encounter and not to be "dug out" of historical documents by the application of psychological enquiries.'\(^9\) The post-Bultmannian 'New Quest of the Historical Jesus', represented by such scholars as, E. Kasemann, Ernst Fuchs, and James M. Robinson, is more kerygmatically centred. Ralph Martin's summary of the old and new approaches shows their differences,

As to approach, the old quest treated the Gospels as biographical quarries from which factual, objective, and psychologically plausible, materials could be dug. When pieced together, these formed a portrait of Jesus as men knew Him 'in the days of His flesh.' The newer approach sees the Gospel as kerygmatically built, as representing the confessional deposit of the church in its preaching, worship, catechetical instruction, apologetics, and self-awareness.\(^9\)

More conservative scholars from around the world have seen real danger in the positions represented by these men, and have presented a more-balanced Biblical view,

\(^9\) Ibid., 35.
arguing that there is enough evidence in the New Testament concerning Jesus, and the events related to Him as historical facts. Comments by evangelical Bruce give insight into the problem:

We know that the Evangelists did not set out to be historiographers, or even biographers. But they did set out to bear witness — or to preserve the witness of others — to what they believed as actually having happened; and their writings provided the historian of early Christianity with the raw material of his craft.

Considering I am developing an evangelically-oriented missiology, I admit to be more comfortable with this less radical orientation. Evangelicals are convinced about the decisiveness of the historicity, of Jesus as reflected by I. Howard Marshall,

For the New Testament writers the historical fact of Jesus was decisive. Their religion was built on what God has done through Jesus. It was not the message in itself that saved men (sic), but the fact to which the message bore witness. An understanding of Christianity which fails to appreciate this fact is a misinterpretation of Christianity. The historical fact of Jesus is essential to the Gospel. However much the writers of the epistle may centre their attention on the risen Christ, they insist that it is the crucified Jesus who is the risen Christ. If there has been no crucified Jesus, there would have been no risen Christ. It is as simple as that.

What the old and new quest of the historical Jesus represent serves to warn Melanesians against believing in a Jesus of their own imagination, or identifying or constructing Him as synonymous with their mythical ancestors, as some communities in Melanesia are doing. But we must now return to the discussion on Jesus as the Gospel in relation to Melanesian understanding of history, time, space, and *Lo* embracing the concept of salvation.

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92 F. F. Bruce, ‘History and the Gospel’, 90.

3:4:2:2 Jesus and History
Writing to the Galatians, Paul declared that 'when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons' (Gal 4:4-5). This is an historical statement from God's perspective. Jesus is the culmination of God's long history for human salvation, and the Jews are famous for having the richest historical and historiographical tradition of antiquity, covering their events in fair detail from about 2000 BC to Jesus' time. The incarnation marks the end of the Old Testament preparatory history of salvation that is pointing to the coming of Jesus and the beginning of a new history of salvation He inaugurated. The preparatory and the fulfilment aspects of the history of salvation is one continuous history from the past, into the present, and on into the future. God's history of salvation has personal relevance to human beings as individuals, clans, tribes, and nations. When Paul says, 'God sent His Son, born of a woman', it takes the reader right back to the beginning of salvation history, before even the Patriarchs, to the primordial figures of Adam and Eve. When Adam and Eve sinned, God promised them that one day the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15). As progenitors of the human race, Adam and Eve are ancestors of all people (Acts 17:26). Jesus is the seed born of the woman (Isa 7:14). To 'be born of a woman' means Jesus is a real human being with a record of birth, place of origin, personal life and achievement, and a record of death.

As to His place in Jewish history, we can follow those who take the view that there are narrative materials which can be left to speak in a straightforward sense, even if there might be minor points of dispute. Jesus' name is recorded in the genealogy of the Jewish ancestors (Mt 1:1-17; Lk 3:23-38). He was probably born in late 5 BC or early 4 BC, born either in December, 5 BC, or January, 4 BC. As to the details of His birth, and early life: prior to His birth Joseph and Mary went from Nazareth to Bethlehem for the census (Lk 2:4-5); Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Mt 2:1; Lk 2:6); was visited at His birth by shepherds (Lk 2:8-20), and the Magi, i.e. magoi (Mt 2:1-12); was circumcized and presented to God in Jerusalem, and returned to Nazareth (Lk

Eerdmans, 1977), 80.
95 Ibid., 27.
96 N.B.: Zoroastrian priests, thus involving another, if related, religion (a Persian).
2:21-9). ‘Because of a dream in Bethlehem they went to Egypt until Herod’s death, and then returned to Nazareth (Mt 3:13-23)97 at the age of 12 He went to Jerusalem, then returned to Nazareth (Lk 2:40-52). The details of His adult life and ministry, and His death, are recorded in the four Gospels. Jesus was born in Bethlehem because of the personal connection His birth had with the historical statement made in the Old Testament (Mic 5:2 = Mt 2:6). In the angelic message delivered to the shepherds on the night Jesus was born, Bethlehem is identified as the home town of David, where Christ, the Lord, was born (Lk 2:11). In Micah’s prophecy, Bethlehem is associated with a clan of Judah, where one ‘who would rule over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient of times’, would be born. The writer to the Hebrews calls Jesus God’s first-born (Heb 1:6). When the information provided in these three passages is put together, we note that the ruler to be born is from the tribe of Judah. Judah was blessed by Jacob with the words: ‘The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until He comes to whom it belongs, and the obedience of the nations is His’ (Gen 48:10). According to the angelic message, the ruler to be born is Christ, the Lord, associated with Bethlehem, the home town of King David of Israel. God promised David that his kingdom and his throne would be established forever (2 Sam 7:16). Melanesians cannot fail to note the fact that Jesus, born to be supreme ruler, was born into the kingly tribe of Judah. As God’s first-born, Jesus is qualified to be the King of Israel. This physical understanding about Jesus provides the facts necessary to believe in Him as the historical root of human salvation.

But, as the New Testament proclaims, Jesus is not just a human being. As the Son of God, ‘God sent His Son’, Jesus shared a personal relationship with God. So, the one who was born of woman had always existed with God before time began. He is the only one qualified to be the divine-human person, the God-man. Divinity and humanity are combined in Him, and have remained with Him since His incarnation. He is known in heaven as the Son of God, and as one born of a woman, He is the Son of man. He is the ideal human being. For human beings to have a personal relationship with God they need to know Jesus, ‘No one has ever seen God, but God the only (Son) who is at the Father’s side has made Him known’ (Jn 1:18 NIV). In Jesus, the human and divine dimensions are uniquely and intricately woven together into an integral person (as the famous Chalcedonian definition was to recognize by 451 AD). In summary, this means

97 Ibid., 27.
no proper understanding of history is possible outside of Jesus Christ. Jesus is thus indispensable to Melanesians’ proper understanding of history, time, and space as having relationship to themselves.

3:4:2:3 Jesus and Time

The statement, ‘[w]hen the time had fully come’, takes us back to the date set by the Father (Gal 4:4). Jesus entered the depth of human experience at the time predetermined by the Father (Gal 1:4). All the preparation the Father made, ‘politically, educationally, and religiously’, 98 and also I will add here culturally, was done with a view to the Son entering the world. The writer of Hebrews sees the time of Christ’s entry into the world as an eschatological event, ‘but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son’ (Heb 1:2). According to the Greek, the speaking is done once-and-for-all. Jesus is God’s once-and-for-all message and messenger ‘to us’, all human kind, both the readers of the Epistle originally, and also all those who read the Epistle from then on until today. The timing stated with the phrase ‘in these last days’ is stated for the benefit of all human beings – Melanesians included. In Jesus, God personally came to deliver His heart-cry to all, the Jews and the Gentiles. The challenging eschatological message is ‘how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard Him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders, and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to His will’ (Heb 2:3-4). Time, in the economy of God, has a deep personal and ontological relationship with all human beings. These are the last days for human beings to respond to the final message of salvation. The message was delivered once-and-for-all in history, yet, on the other hand, the effect of it is timeless and time-limited. It is ‘timeless’ in the sense that every day provides people everywhere with the opportunity to respond to God’s offer of salvation. It is ‘time-limited’ in that the offer to respond belongs to this world, not later, ‘man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment’ (Heb 9:27).

Time has a relationship to human beings, and to Jesus in His humanity. When Jesus’ mother told Him that they had no more wine at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, Jesus answered, ‘Dear woman, why do you involve Me? . . . My time has not yet come’ (Jn 2:4). Jesus came into this world to do one thing only – the will of His

Father, 'I have come to do Your will, O God' (Heb 10:7, 9). When His disciples asked Him to eat, He said, 'My food . . . is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work' (Jn 4:34). To carry out the Father's will, Jesus had to follow the Father's timetable. Barrett understands 'my time' or 'my hour' as having reference to the cross, that is the death of Jesus on the cross.  

About the time or the hour, as referred to in John's Gospel, according to Hendrikson, it 'clearly indicates Christ's consciousness of the fact that He was accomplishing a task entrusted to Him by the Father, every detail of which had been definitely marked off in the eternal decree, so that for each act there was a stipulated moment (see also 7:6, 8; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1; 17:1)'). The life of Jesus, and His death on the cross, are part of the core of the Gospel message for the salvation of the people. So the concept of time as it relates to the Gospel is intimately connected with the need of humanity. The eternal Son of God who lived in the eternal now became time-bound, according to His Father's decree, in order to save sinful humanity. Not only history and time but space also is concerned with human salvation.

3:4:2:4 Jesus and Space

Jesus died on the cross 'to redeem those under the law that we might receive the full rights of heirs' (Gal 4:5,7). The work of redemption includes incarnation, death, and resurrection, which again are important parts of the core of the Gospel. Now space comes into the salvific work in intriguing ways. In his study on the presupposed cosmology in Hebrews, helping us orient ourselves, Ellingworth makes the following comments on the phrase, 'Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour' (Heb 2:9): 'Taken by itself, "lower" could refer to status rather than place; but that Jesus was originally, and is now, above the angels is implied in "for a little while" expressed in 1:2-4, and again implied throughout chapter 1'. At first, Jesus was above the angels in heaven, in coming down to the earth He passed through the intermediate space of the angels; He came to the earth, the lower part of the universe. He passed through the intermediate space of the world, into the highest heaven. Thus, in His downward and upward movement, Jesus united the whole

universe into a oneness with Himself; and in so doing He rules over the world of humanity, and the heavenly world of the spirits. Ellingworth's expressions are to be understood anthropomorphically rather than as literal relationship statements. But, the anthropomorphic language is the best we have to describe what are spiritual, cosmic, and eternal realities.

In Ephesians, Paul speaks of Jesus ascending to the highest of the heavens after having descended to the lower regions, 'in order to fill the whole universe' (Eph 4:9-10). The ascension refers to His physical going up to heaven after the resurrection (Acts 1:11). The passage in Acts also says that He will come back physically in the same way the disciples saw Him go up. 'Men of Galilee . . . why do you stand here looking into the sky? The same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven.' In Colossians, Jesus is presented as creator, redeemer, and the all-conquering Lord, so that in the earthly space, and in the heavenly one, 'He might have the supremacy' (Col 1:15-20). He has gone up into heaven to represent humans at the throne of grace, so that anybody can come to the holy God through Him without fear or restriction of any kind (Heb 4:14-16). According to Hebrews, the reason for His coming back is 'to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him' (Heb 9:28).

Peter picks up the descending and ascending movements of Jesus to encourage Christians to hold firmly to their faith (1 Pet 3:19 and 4:6). In His death, Jesus descended into the world of the dead. In His resurrection, He ascended victoriously into the world of the living, 'once-for-all, the righteous for the unrighteous' (1 Pet 3:18). The resurrection of Jesus represents His victory over the power of Satan and death. Some modern commentators believe that 'the spirits in prison' mentioned in 1 Pet 3:19 are not the souls of dead human beings but evil, rebellious forces, such as fallen angels (2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6), who had corrupted the generations of Noah and led them away from God. On the basis of this understanding, Kistemaker has suggested that the word 'went' in 1 Peter 3:19 refers to Christ's ascension into heaven as in 1 Peter 3:22.

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word ‘preached’ in 1 Peter 3:19, in the Greek, speaks about the public proclamation or announcement of commendation or condemnation. In the context of the passage, Kistemaker says that the passage is talking about Jesus publicly declaring His victory over the powers at work in heaven or on earth as represented by ‘angels, authorities, and powers’ (1 Pet 3:22). On the basis of Acts 1:11; Ephesians 4:9-10; Colossians 1:15-20; and Hebrews 4:14-16; discussed above, there is a strong case for the position Kistemaker has presented.

Kistemaker along with other commentators agree that ‘those who are now dead’ in 1 Peter 4:6 are those who have heard the Gospel preached to them but are now dead. They might have died from the hands of cruel men and women who persecuted them. Their argument is based on the Greek word euangelizo, which means to proclaim the Good News, or to evangelize.

Other commentators interpret the two passages (1 Pet 3:19 and 4:6) differently. Norman Hillyer has pointed out that the whole section of 1 Peter 3:18-4:6 constitutes a chiastic literal unity. He believes that the whole mission of Christ includes the Old Testament dead. He sees the spirits in prison representing human souls confined to sheol/hades, to the place of the dead ‘until Christ’s own triumph over death.’104 C. E. B. Cranfield says there may be a hint here referring to human souls.

It is a hint within the canon of Scripture that the atoning efficacy of Christ’s death was available to those who died in paganism in all the ages before Christ, and also, surely, a hint that those, who in subsequent ages have died without ever having had a real chance to believe in Him are not beyond the reach of His saving power.105

On the basis of the alternate views presented here, this raises the possible interpretation that Melanesian men and women, young and old, who died before the coming of the Gospel may have heard the message of salvation from the lips of Jesus. Certainly, our Melanesian understanding of the ‘living-dead’ gives a basis for fresh interpretation of these difficult verses.

The significance of the Gospel with reference to history, time, and space, Biblically considered, is well summarized by Francis Foulkes when commenting on Ephesians 4:9-10.

There seems to be two points that the apostle is wanting to stress here. Firstly, it is Christ's will and purpose for everything to be pervaded with His presence (cf. 1:10). He has descended and ascended that He might fill all things. He is supreme over all the powers both of heaven and earth (cf. 1:16ff); there is nothing that is not subject to Him, no place or order of existence where His presence may not be known or felt. Both the descent and the ascent have this purpose. . . . Secondly, we are to realize that the ascended Lord, whom the Church now worships is the same as He who came down and lived among men, sharing their sorrows, trials and temptations, and therefore that He feels those of His people today.106

3:4:2:5 Jesus and the Law

In His incarnation, Jesus subjected Himself to the law God had put into operation in the world, in order to put into action God's redemptive plan for the world. Thus again, 'God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of heirs' (Gal 4:4-5). As a Jew, Jesus was born and raised under the Jewish law. He was therefore subject to all that the Jewish people were subject to. But Jesus is more than a Jew. He is the ideal human being, born for all human beings. In subjecting Himself to the law of God, He was doing this for the benefit of all human beings. Jesus was born under the law to redeem those who are under the law. Jesus obeyed the law to save human beings. He who is the law-giver became the law-abider in order to save law-breakers. Jesus redeemed the people, thus enabling them to be adopted into the family of God as His sons and daughters. By implication, then, Jesus offers the Melanesians what the Melanesian ancestors could not offer their people.

3:4:3 Summary

The Christian Gospel transforms all history, time, space, and Lo into the fullness of salvation which is found in Jesus Christ. The Melanesian and the Biblical understanding of salvation are both relationship oriented. The Melanesian perspective is rooted in the ancestors, while the Biblical view is based on the 'Person and Work of Jesus'. The salvation Melanesian ancestors offer is very limited in scope. It originates with, and is centred in, the community. As the ancestors are members of a given clan or community, they can only provide for their given community. This salvation the ancestors offer is human and this-earthly. The salvation Jesus offers is for all the people

of the world, and therefore for all the clans and communities in Melanesia. The salvation He offers encapsulates the heart-cry of a holy God for sinful people. This salvation is focussed in Jesus, one solitary figure who is identified as Adam's substitute, therefore the ancestor of all people. Since Jesus is the God-man, history, time, space, and Lo represent human and divine dimensions in one. Jesus brings humanity and divinity into oneness with each other. Jesus takes human children and turns them into God's children. No Melanesian ancestor could achieve what Jesus accomplished. The salvation or the Gospel enshrined in Jesus is for the ancestors and the living community. Since the ancestors receive salvation from Jesus, they cannot be originators of salvation. Jesus is the embodiment of the ancestors and the community. Jesus is the fulfilment of Melanesian ancestral heritage. He is the salvation and Saviour of the Melanesians. At the same time, Jesus links Melanesian ancestors to all the ancestors and peoples of the world.

3:5 SUMMARY

The discussion in this chapter has shown that, in general terms, Melanesian ancestral heritage prepared Melanesians for the coming of the Gospel or Christianity. Although Christianity originated in the East, in Palestine, it was taken to the West, to Rome and beyond. It became the responsibility of the West to take the Gospel to the non-Western world. For reasons best known to God, Christianity spread with Western colonial interests. Christianity was brought to Melanesia by Western missionaries. The message of Christianity, based in Jesus of Nazareth, the Saviour of the world, is the message the Melanesians have to listen to and respond to. Even though Christianity is mixed with Christendom, the Gospel has transformed Melanesians into God's sons and daughters. Melanesians have made Christianity their way of life. In some senses, unfortunately, and in others, fortunately, their Melanesian ancestral heritage, founded on the ancestors, continues to have a strong influence on the people. This highlights the need to explain the Gospel truth in meaningful Melanesian cultural ways. Our discussion has shown how the Gospel, focussed on Jesus, corresponds to the central concepts associated with Melanesian ancestral heritage. On the one hand, the universal claims of the Gospel have to be taken seriously by looking at the way Melanesian culture can be incorporated into that universality/catholicity. On the other hand, each individual culture, as a reflection of divine activity, requires harmony, and needs to be looked at carefully as a background to the coming of the Gospel to any particular locality.
This discussion has sought to outline the values and the differences between Melanesian ancestral heritage and Christianity, to help Melanesians to consider and make their own decision. This chapter sets the stage to look at the people of Sentani in the West Papuan Province of Indonesia as a specific Melanesian community, and to look at a specific book of the Bible, which, in my own opinion, best explains the theme of the thesis.
Plate 1: Map of West Papua and Papua New Guinea.
(Reprinted from Jacaranda Modern World Atlas for Papua New Guinea (Milton, Queensland: John Wiley & Sons Australia, 1989).)

Plate 2: Map of Lake Sentani.
(Reprinted from Jan H. Ramandei, Iegeri Puyakha [Clear Water Region] (Satya Jaya Jayapura: Dinas Pendidikan dan Pengajaran Dari Irian Jaya, 1999).)
CHAPTER FOUR
A SPECIFIC LOOK AT SENTANI CULTURE

4:1 INTRODUCTION

So far, in chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis, we have looked at Melanesian religion and Christianity in general ways. This chapter will attempt a discussion on the culture of the Sentani people, the people I belong to, who live near Jayapura in West Papua, the most easterly province of the Republic of Indonesia.

The discussion in this chapter will centre on:

- The Location and History of Lake Sentani
- The Origin Stories of the People of Sentani
- The Beliefs of the People of Sentani
- The Structure of the Community of the People of Sentani
- The Christian Faith in Sentani

4:2 THE LOCATION, HISTORY AND ORIGIN OF LAKE SENTANI

4:2:1 The Location and History of Lake Sentani

Lake Sentani is situated some 30 kilometres to the south-west of Jayapura, the capital of West Papua. The people who live in the 22 villages along the lake are called Sentanians, and speak the Sentani language. The lake is divided into East, Middle and West. The Sentani language consists of three closely-related dialects. The people understand and communicate readily with each other in this tongue. The Indonesian language or Bahasa Indonesia (hereafter Bahasa) is also spoken by the Sentanians, since Bahasa is now the main national language of West Papua. The Dutch government and mission used Bahasa as the educational and communication language during the Dutch colonial administration. Those educated under the Dutch also speak Dutch, in addition to Bahasa, and their own tribal or regional languages.

The Sentanians believe the fresh-water lake along which their 22 villages are built is a gift from Dobonai, a mountain god of Mount Dobonsoro, the highest peak of Mt. Cyclops on the north-east of Lake Sentani, which overlooks the lake itself.
According to my two best informants, Joku and Joku, Dobonai is a warbo, warofo or uarofo — a guardian, provider and protector spirit. In summing up the function and appearance of the uarofo, Kamma says,

[It may be stated that the uarofos are superhuman, supernatural, and to a certain extent, irrational. But as the veil over the belief of the Sentanians, which was and is secret, is not yet lifted, the possibilities to complete a kind of overall picture of the religion of the people, is still a challenge. Never was the name of their High-God mentioned. We only know that he exists in the Sentani religion, and in the hearts of the inhabitants.]

4:2:2 The Origin of Lake Sentani or Bu-Yakala (clear-water)

The Sentanians believe that originally the sky and the earth existed as one unit. When they were separated, ondofofo (head of village and region) Wali, and his ancestor Haboi, who lived at Yomoko (now called Kwadewari), saw that the people on earth had neither water nor fire. One day Wali and Haboi decided to visit Dobonai to purchase some clear water from him. They took some traditional money: a ring made of glass (eba) and three beads (coloured glass) hawa, hay[e] and naro. They made their way up the mountain to buy water from Dobonai. After Wali and Haboi had paid Dobonai’s two wives, Dobonai took them around and showed them water from three different pools. The water in the first pool, where the people washed themselves, was dirty, so was the water in the second one, Dobonai’s personal bathing pool. The water in the third pool, from which Dobonai got his drinking water, was beautiful and clear, with a fish (yowi) or barramundi at the bottom. Wali and Haboi accepted this water. They drew out the water with the fish, in a bucket they had made from leaves. Dobonai personally tied the bucket up to stop the water from leaking out. Dobonai forbade them from hunting on their way home, so he tied up their bows and arrows. On their way home, however, Wali and Haboi saw a wild swine. They put the bucket down, and while they tried to shoot the wild swine, the bucket tore, the water spilled out and started to flow down. It soon turned into a fast-flowing river, dragging Wali and Haboi away. Haboi rescued himself and Wali by stabbing a bone-dagger into the ground just in front of the flowing river. The river went underground, it emerged further down below and started to fill the

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1 Henk and Min Joku (informants), a husband and wife, who provided this information in Port Moresby in 1994, come from Ifar Besar (big Ifar), one of the larger villages in middle Sentani.


3 Freerk C. Kamma, Religious Texts of the Oral Tradition from Western New Guinea: The Threat of Life and Its Defence Against 'Natural' and 'Supernatural' Phenomena [collected and translated by
valley which turned into an extensive lake just in front of the two men. Wali and Haboi discovered they could not walk back to Yomoko. They cut down a tree, made a canoe from it and thus paddled their way back home.

The lake provided the Sentanians with beautiful clear drinking and bathing water. The lake is full of all kinds of fish, including barramundi, crocodile, and sawfish. Between 1950 and 1960 the people of the village of Sosirih (my village) used to catch a lot of barramundi in a nearby river. At the head of this river there is a big lump of clay in the water, which is believed to be the mother of barramundi.

The coming of Indonesians from many parts of Indonesia has brought great changes to the lake. The people’s traditional methods of fishing have changed. Nowadays they use fishing nets and underwater fishing spears. Indonesians have introduced new varieties of fish, which the people say have eaten up or killed some species of fish which used to be in the lake.

4:3 THE ORIGIN STORIES OF THE PEOPLE OF SENTANI

The work that Kamma and others have carried out shows several versions of traditions concerning the origin of the people of Sentani. The two most important myths collected by Kamma and Wirz, though differing in detail, say that the original inhabitants of the Lake emerged out of the earth. It would seem that when these original people settled around the lake, East, Middle and West, they were later joined by immigrants from the sea-shore, and from near the border of Papua New Guinea and West Papua. These stories are summarized below.

Before the earth and human beings came to exist, utter darkness covered everything and the only object that existed was an egg.

Then the northern wind blew (from heaven), touched the egg and broke the shell, and out of the egg came a female being named Kani (earth). In the beginning, heaven hovered over the earth at very close range. The first human beings could easily climb and descend to and from heaven by way of a huge banyan tree (yowake) with rattan and a rope made of the clouds.

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Kamma, The Origin and Sources of Life, 53,54.
Ibid., 52-53.
4:3:1 Warowo and Mahowe, Fathers of Mankind

One version of this story collected by Kamna, reads Warowo and Mahuwe are two warbo or uarofo, who lived inside the earth. While Warowo remained inside the earth, Mahowe dug his way out to the surface of the earth with a stone axe and appeared on an island called Ajau in the middle part of Lake Sentani. Mahowe built himself a house and made a drum. When he had finished the house and the drum, he blew on the conch-shell and beat his drum. The blowing of the conch-shell and the boom of the drum attracted a female spirit Tariaka, who lived in the village Tabati (near the seashore). To find out where the sound came from, Tariaka travelled in a south-westly direction until she reached the island of Ajau. She brought grilled sea-fish, some pork, and parcels of sago-porridge as presents. Her parents followed her later, and came to live in a place called Ifar Ketjil (small Ifar). Mahuwe gave them a small blue bracelet made of stone as dowry and took Tariaka to be his wife.

Mahowe and Tariaka had many children who were ordinary human beings. When the children had matured, the two spirits (warbo, uarofo) – Mahowe and Tariaka – went back inside the earth through the hole that Mahowe had dug to get to the surface.

To remember their father, Mahowe’s sons carved an image out of wood, and named it Mahowe.

In times of need and stress the names of Mahowe and Tariaka are still mentioned, they are called upon to give help and support. After Mahowe had withdrawn himself, his power had been transferred to his eldest son. He became therefore the first ondopofolo (as it is said in middle Sentani) [after this M. Sentani], or ondoporo (west Sentani) [after this W. Sentani] over his brothers and sisters. This rank was transmitted to the following generations, and became the prerogative of the eldest son.7

The story of Mahowe ascending from and descending into the earth tells us that the Sentanians are descendants of the spirits, with the earth as their mother. Kani (earth) being female is capable of conceiving and giving birth. It is possible that kani conceived and bore Warowo and Mahowe and kept them inside her womb, until Mahowe found his way to the surface of the earth. This is seen more clearly in the next story collected by P. Wirz (see below in 4:3:2). It should also be noted that house-building, drum-making, and beating and blowing of conch-shells are spirit-related skills, objects, and sounds. These objects are the property of the ondoporo, and are therefore

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6 Ibid., 53-54.
7 Ibid., 54.
the property of the spirits represented by the ondoporo. The community can use them but must do so with proper respect towards the ancestral spirits. The community inherits these properties or objects from the spirit world, and placed them under the custodianship of the ondoporo. A living and strong relationship exists between human beings and their spirit-ancestors. My informants, Joku and Joku, said that even today, when necessary, the people call on such spirits as Mahowe and Tariaka for help and support. Mahowe is called ondofoalo (M. Sentani) or ondoporo (W. Sentani) This ranking system is being followed today in all the villages. The ondoporo is head of his family, clan, village, and the region to which he belongs.8

4:3:2 Mehue and the First Human Beings9

We turn now to the second story, which was collected by Wirz in Sentani. In Wirz’s version of the myth, the first human called Mehue started his life inside the earth, together with the community, which he led to the surface of the earth. Mehue made a drum and called it Ghawachu or twilight drum (gha: twilight, wachu: drum), and two stone axes, and a bracelet made out of a small conch-shell. He called the people together by beating the drum to prepare them to come out of the earth. One person from Monim-clan died in the process. Before they came out, Mehue sent his servant (ufoi)10 upward to investigate and bring a report back. Ufoi, the servant or the messenger, did not return as quickly as the people expected. When he at last got back he told them that there was an island, a good place to live. Because he took so long to come back, the people got angry with him. Ufoi started to cry and decided not to go with them to the surface of the earth. ‘He said: “I will stay here inside the earth, and when you die you will come inside the earth again”.11

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8 Ondoporo is the chief of the village and region. He is the number one kosero, the first among the brothers. The village ondoporo is the political and religious leader of the village, with jurisdiction over the whole village. The regional ondoporo is the chief of all the ondoporos in his region. What is important is that all the koseros and ondoporos are brothers. They are brothers leading or looking after the brothers. In Sentani there are three regional ondoporos. The oldest brother of the three ondoporos is the paramount chief, or the number one ondoporo, with jurisdiction over all the Sentanians. The three regional ondoporos are invested with the power for life and death. They have the power to make decisions without consulting the others. The Allaleh A Nome Hetaunggekoke Homofae, God’s New Talk Written on Paper, The New Testament in Sentani Language, uses ondoporo or ondofoalo as a designation for King, e.g. Ondofoalo Herodes (Yesusle Abu Ako, Jesus’ Spokesmen (Acts 12:1). See also Ondofoalo Agrippa (Acts 25:13).

9 Kamma, The Origia and Sources of life, 54.

10 U = body. foi = good. Ufoi = good body, or messenger of peace, or peace maker.

11 Ibid., 55.
Mehue was first to reach the surface of the earth on the island of Ajau, at the highest point, called, Puhikere. The Ondi (clan) came out at a place called Naval or Pulende, in middle Sentani dialect, or Busende in western Sentani. The Tokodo or Tokoro (clan) came out near the western end of the island, at a point named Wakare. The Ibo and Monim clan appeared at a place called Naisow (Ifar-Ketil: small-Ifar).

The people built their homes at the place where they came out of the earth. Mehue married a woman from east Sentani named Jochumocho. Ondi married Tokodo’s daughter. Tokodo married Ondi’s daughter. Mehue became Ondoaso, or Ondoapi, and war-leader. He made war with the people in east, west, and south Sentani. Mehue asked Hokoi or Tokoi to help him. Hokoi helped Mehue, but questioned the Ondi-group and Tokodo-group as to why they did not help. “They said, ‘We are ondopololo (chiefly clan), so we could not take part in a war on our own behalf’.” This resulted in the groups being dispersed from each other to live in different places in Sentani.

Mehue was the big-chief or Ondoaso Kabam (big or number-one leader), superior to all the other ondoasos. In the west, there was another important ondoapi and war-leader, Marweri. At the eastern end there was another ondoaso named Ohei or Ohe. As Mehue was ondoaso kabam or ondoapi Kabang, 17 of his descendants representing 17 generations were in power. Of these 17 descendants, three were outstanding leaders: Jochu (Joku), Palo, and Daime (Daimoi). Mehue is ‘the tree’, Jochu, Palo and Daime are the three branches of the original tree, representing three generations. The children of these four men became the original Sentani people.

These stories call for some comments. The name Mahowe in the first story, and Mehue in this latter one, though spelled differently, may refer to the same person. If this is so, then Mahowe, the first spirit-ancestor, has returned to live amongst the living communities. However, since Mahowe and Mehue married two different women, the stories probably represent two different traditions. Mahowe is called ondoporo (head of the village and the region), while Mehue is identified as ondoapi (war-leader). It is of interest that the recently-published New Testament in Sentani uses the word ondoporo

12 Pulende or Busende in Sentani means the belly-button.
13 Ondoaso or Ondoapi in middle and western Sentani dialects, respectively, is a Malay word meaning chief or government appointee.
14 Ibid., 55.
15 Kabam or Kabang means big or chief or number one in middle and western Sentani dialects, respectively.
16 Ibid., 56.
for King. Thus King Agrippa in Acts 25:13, 24 is called On doporo Agrippa. This means that, traditionally, on doporo denotes something like a royal rank, and ondoapi is more a military designation. However, nowadays these two titles are used interchangeably. On doporo represents an hereditary position, whilst ondoapi represents a political or government appointment.

The on doporo's position is one which has been installed and blessed by the ancestral spirits once-and-for-all. Since it is an hereditary position, it cannot be altered without the approval of the ancestral spirits. To alter or to disrespect one installed by the ancestral spirits is to invoke the ancestral curse. The ancestral spirits may remove the rebellious individual, or withdraw their blessing from the entire community if another on doporo is appointed who does not belong to the on doporo descent. Should the ancestral spirits withdraw their blessing then the entire community will eventually die out.

The different clans mentioned in Wirz's collection are still in existence today. Different clans, therefore, have to relate to the founder of that clan as their clan ancestor. The leadership structures described in the two stories are still being adhered to today. It is interesting to note that life and death are part of human experience. The origin of life is also the origin of death.

Apart from the inhabitants of Lake Sentani originating from inside the earth, others have come to inhabit the Lake by way of immigration.

4:3:3 The First Immigrants (The Way to Heaven)\(^7\)

The inhabitants of the village Abar on the south-east of the middle part of the lake originally came from a place near Kayu-Batu in the Humboldt Bay area, at the 'gateway' of Jayapura. These people reached Abar by walking across the sky. At the cape where they lived, there grew an enormous banyan-tree (yowake), the crown of which reached the valve, or the arch, of heaven. Once they reached the heavenly platform they walked on it in a southerly direction until they reached a spot just above Abar. They saw the island Aitemaru (present-day Puyo Ketjil), where Abar was situated, and it looked good to them. By means of a long piece of rattan cane, or perhaps the air-roots of the banyan tree, they tried to descend to Abar. To ensure that it was all right to descend, they let a cooking pot down first, then a dog. When everything

\(^7\) Ibid., 56-57.
looked fine they descended. The first man to get down was Pukaro, the rest then followed him. Their first food was earth, but 'an old woman from Humboldt Bay taught them to eat sago and coconut.'

What is especially important about these Abar people is that they allegedly looked like giants. 'They fought their battles and made raids resulting in robbery everywhere. They even went into the interior to the south. Their fame ended with a horrible revenge from the Sentani people: black magic finished nearly all of them, only a few were left alive.'

Comments: In the 1950s when this author and other school boys and girls crossed this part of the lake in a canoe, we saw only three or four houses in this village of Abar. Black magic has had, and continues to have, destructive power in Sentani. In 1989, when I interviewed an old man, and my younger brother, I learned that originally there were five Daimoi clans. Three of them were completely wiped out by black magic, leaving two clans, consisting of two families only.

4:3:4 Immigrants from the East and the Snake

The present-day inhabitants of the villages in east Sentani: Asei, Ayapo, Sobeiburu, are descendants of those who immigrated from a village named Fenemyo-Wauwauyo, high in the mountains at a place near Omaka, east of the border between West Papua and Papua New Guinea. Dohayo, the high chief of the village decided that on a certain day he was going to name all his ondoporo. They all agreed to celebrate the occasion.

To prepare for the occasion, everybody went into the forest to find adornment. Only a son of Taime (ancestor of the mountain people) could not find what he wanted, because all the feathers had been used up. His mother told him to climb a banyan tree to shoot some bird of paradise but not to kill them. He adorned himself with the living bird, and became the centre of attraction.

As the people gathered together, the earth started to shudder and the nearby mountains rumbled. A giant snake came out of the earth, and appeared to be very angry as it came up to the dancing ground. The mother of Dohayo, the ondopofolo, saw the snake and alerted everybody. The people collected their valuables and offered them to the snake, but it would not accept them. Then the mother of the ondofolo gathered all

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18 Ibid., 57.
19 Ibid., 57.
20 Ibid., 60-62.
her valuables and adornments and proceeded to adorn Taime and decorated him as beautifully as she could. When Taime appeared on the dancing site, the snake instantly opened its jaws to swallow him up. The old men spoke to the snake, to shut its jaws up, and to straighten its tail for Taime to sit on. Then the snake took to the sea with Taime on its tail and swam as a ship to the west. The mother of Taime stood at the beach and looked: she remained there and became petrified into a rock. The snake continued to swim; where its body twisted, bays and capes came into existence. The snake swam via Skow and Tabati to a place called Nafri (Hebele).

At Nafri, Taime changed his adornments. They went over the hills and came to Lake Sentani. With the head of the snake going in the direction of the islet Tansidjau-Yokoba, it disappeared under the surface of the water with Taime on its back. Another story says the place where the snake went down is near the present-day Ayapo. The ondofolo is still riding on the back of the snake. He must still be there. ‘Every now and then he makes the lake foam, which is a bad omen’, a sign or warning to the people that soon a member of the ondofolo clan will die. Nowadays, according to Alfrida Fuapla, one of my informants, a stone appears over the water and travels over the surface of the lake like a ship. When the people see this they say to themselves that the ancestor of the place has appeared, soon someone from the ondoporo family will die.

Because of what took place, all the people who had gathered on the dance site near the border of West Papua and Papua New Guinea scattered in all directions. The Ohi or Ohe group followed the path of the snake to the west. When they reached Skow, the people with sore legs stayed behind. Others continued on until they reached Sentani, at a place near present-day Asei. They fought against the tribes who lived there. When peace was agreed on, the people from the east were allowed to settle there. As their numbers grew larger, the family groups split up. Some went to live in Ayapo, others in Yoka, Waena, and Asei-Ketjil (small Asei).

These stories of the origin of Lake Sentani, and the Sentanians who live along the lake, form the backbone of the people’s life and belief. The Sentanians see themselves as spirit-centred people. They are the descendants of the ancestral spirits referred to in these stories. They look to the spirits as their ancestors who are responsible for their daily needs; they believe that when they die their spirits will go to be with these their ancestral spirit-beings. Death for the Sentanians is a return to their

21 Ibid., 62.
22 Ibid., 62.
home inside the earth, where *Ufoi* (the servant of Mehue) and Warowo, the companion of Mahuwe, remained behind. They also know that their original ancestors, Mahuwe and Tariaka, have returned to the underworld. Mahuwe and Tariaka, *Ufoi*, Warowo and Taime are spirits, they are *warbo* or *uarobo*, and as spirits they do not die. The Sentanians know that their ancestors watch over them and provide for them, and will receive them to the home of the spirits when they die. Death for them is going back to the home of the ancestors where there is an abundance of everything.

The Sentanians also know that their roots go back to the people of Tabati, Engros, Kaju-Batu, Nafri, and Skow on the seashore, and all the way back to the east to Utung, Vanimo, and Wewak on the Papua New Guinea side. These are the places where their ancestors have come from. Their ancestors have opened up the paths for them. Their history has provided them with a royal highway, to travel from west to east and back because their ancestor Taime was and is their *ondofolo* or *ondoporoo*. To return to the home of your ancestors in times of need is to be welcomed and cared for by your ancestors. To seek refuge on the Papua New Guinea side of the border is not just a political convenience, but a re-establishing of a political, social, and religious solidarity. The histories traced so far show that long before the colonial governments carved the island of Papua New Guinea-West Papua into pieces, a deep political, social, and religious solidarity existed amongst the people of this one big island.

4.4 THE BELIEFS OF THE PEOPLE OF SENTANI
As indicated above, the Sentanians, like all Melanesians, are a spirit-centred people. They see themselves as descendants of the earth and the sky simultaneously. They are certainly people of both the land and the water. The beliefs of the Sentanians are intricately woven with their history. Their history is their religion. History and religion for the Sentanians, as for all Melanesians, are the roots of their existence. Their villages, houses, cooking and eating utensils, sleeping mats, musical instruments, and their fighting weapons are spirit-animated. These possessions carry with them the presence and the influence of their ancestors.

The world of the Sentanians, as their history reveals, is an interrelated one, where the animate and the inanimate, the visible and the invisible, the living and the dead, the human and the non-human, act and interact with each other continually. The Sentanians see their world consisting of *ayeh-ana* (fathers and mothers, or ancestors), *do-mia* (men and women, or people), *akera-bukera* (jungles and waters), *buna-yauna* (of
the water and the dry land), and *humana-ana* (of above and of below). The Sentanian world exists in pairs—a dual entity, as in men and women, boys and girls. This dual existence is an interrelated, interdependent unity. Thus the community exists not just in pairs, but in unity, or in one holistic universe. This holistic unity brings the human world, or the world above the earth, and the spirit world, or the world inside the earth, into relationship with each other.

Figure 3: The Sentanian view of community, consisting of the world above and below, and all that is in between, all interrelated, interdependent, and holistic.

When Mahuwe's sons carved the image of their father out of wood, they did this to keep them in touch with the reality represented by the carving. These carvings are like modern-day photographs. They reminded the people of their relatives who are alive in the world of the spirits, and are part of their community life. The interrelated, interdependent view of life recognizes the fact that at every level of life human beings have to deal with other beings, whether they be spirits, ancestors, totems, or animate and inanimate entities. This interrelated, interdependent existence is seen clearly in the Sentanian view of a person in their community.

4.4.1 The Sentanian View of a Person

This close interrelationship with the spirit world is seen clearly in the Sentanian understanding of the human make-up. In Sentanian belief, the human make-up consists of five parts. Firstly, there is the physical and visible part called *uah*. *Uah* is the physical body, the visible and touchable part of human life, the part that decays away at
death. Secondly, there is the unuru or unulu, which is the shadow of the body. Unuru is identical with maseh, which is the spirit of the recent dead, because maseh, although appearing to be real, is like a shadow, it cannot be touched or held in hand. For this reason unuru is identified as maseh. Thirdly, is the tambu. Tambu is a visible and an invisible corporeal reality. It can assume the form of a human being, a bat, fire-fly, or whistling-birds. As an invisible being, tambu plays tricks on living humans. As a trickster, tambu takes the people on a walk away from their garden by blocking the path to them. Tambu roams from place to place. As a visible reality, though, tambu communicates with others. Tambu acts as a messenger in the form of maska (fire-fly). When a maska appears in the house or bedroom, the people interpret it as tambu-te, that is, a spirit messenger who has come with an important message. Often the people catch the maska, put it on the palm of their hand and ask questions to obtain the message. The questions usually consist of naming different clans in the village. The maska flies away when the right clan is named. This normally means that someone from that clan, if not sick already, will soon get sick and die. When fish in the lake suddenly die in large quantities at a certain location, people see that as tambu-te. The message is that someone who is an ondoporo or ondoapi related to the area where the fish have died will get sick and die, or if someone is already sick then he or she will die soon. I have personally witnessed two incidents like this that proved to be true. The fourth part of the human personality for the Sentanians is the ayeh. Ayeh is a retaliatory spirit. This spirit is the soul of a person who dies an unnatural death, such as, death by accident, killing, murder, or war. This spirit roams around the ground where death has occurred, and seeks to attack people to avenge his or her death. Ayeh is bound to the spot or the locality of the accident. Ayeh makes its presence known in the form of a sudden rush of wind, the breaking of tree branches, or movements in the bushes. Ayeh is thought to be present when branches break one after the other, or through continuous movements in the bushes. After the Second World War, the Sentanians had a lot of problems with the ayeh of Japanese soldiers killed in the jungles. According to the information obtained, the ayeh of the Japanese soldiers would chase the people working in their gardens, or who wanted to get to the gardens at the location where these soldiers were killed.

To get rid of the ayeh, a ritual of cleansing or exorcism is carried out by means of fire-smoke in the jungle, or through water smashing (bu-peterere) in the village. In the jungle, the appropriate elder, normally the community mediator or priest, called (abu-ako), lights a fire of dry and green branches and leaves. As the smoke covers the jungle,
he will speak words of incantations to bid farewell to the ayeh to depart to the world of the dead. The water-smashing ritual is done for the same reason, that is, to farewell the ayeh and to free the people from its power and presence. This kind of cleansing is normally carried out in the village. When all the villagers have gathered at one spot of the lake, they would be called to stand in ankle- or knee-deep water, the abu-ako splits the water by smashing over it with a coconut branch (kotombi). As he utters incantationary words, simultaneously all the villagers, young and old, wash their feet, hands, and arms with leaves to cleanse or to rid themselves from the power and influence of ayeh.

The fifth part of the human personality for the Sentanians is the maseh. Maseh is what leaves the body in the form of noh (breath) or unoh (body-breath) at death. When noh leaves the body it immediately takes on a corporeal form and becomes maseh (spirit). This is the spiritual part of the human personality that survives death and continues to exist in a different form. The people believe maseh returns to the village on the night of the burial or the night the person dies to inform the relatives of the cause of his or her death. If maseh does not return to communicate with the living, it is assumed that sorcery has been the cause of death. Maseh is gentle and kind, it does not bring harm to people. Maseh is believed to be the real person with new qualities of life. Regardless of the person's physical age, maseh is tall, good-looking, and youthful. The maseh of infants, youths, adults, and grey-haired elderly are the same in appearance: tall, good-looking, and youthful. Traditionally, the belief is all maseh live at the cemetery. In the current Christian context, maseh is the spirit that goes into the presence of God.

This understanding of the human make-up therefore demonstrates the Sentanian belief in the existence of life beyond death. The Sentanians, like other Melanesians, share space, and everything else, with their departed family members of long ago, or of recent days. Moreover, their solidarity with the environment around them, tells them that they are part of the land and water creatures.

The people of Sosirih, a village on the western end of Lake Sentani believe that the fresh-water saw-fish that lives in the lake originally was a beautiful young woman who fell into the water from a canoe while travelling and turned into a saw-fish. The saw-fish is the ancestral-totem of the Enok tribe. For this reason, no one from the Enok

23 The close connection between noh and maseh made it difficult for informants, Joku and Joku, to distinguish between the two entities.
tribe is allowed to kill and eat the saw-fish. Anyone from the Enok tribe who breaks this taboo will become a sickly weakling, all the hair on the head will fall off, and the head will become scabious. Similarly, the crocodile of the lake is considered to be to the ancestral-totem of the Daimoi tribe. If that taboo is broken, the person who transgressed against this established ancestral Lo, will become a sickly weakling, and the same fate will result. If confession is in order, I have eaten crocodile meat several times, but nothing has happened to me. The people also believe that when a person is attacked by a crocodile or a saw-fish all that the victim needs to do is to call out Daimoi, or Enok, and the crocodile or the saw-fish, as the case may be, will release the victim.

The strong relationship the Sentanians have with the spirit world forbids Sentanian nursing mothers from eating certain types of fish for fear that the child might die or become a weakling. At the end of the nursing period some spell will be carried out to permit her to eat the forbidden fish and some other food. Some garden spells forbid certain types of fish from being cooked in the garden to prevent wild pigs from destroying the garden.

The Sentanians regard some stones as spirits, or totems, imbued with power to protect, provide, and prosper. Prayers and sacrifices are offered to these stones to obtain blessing from the spirit world.

These stones are sacred and no house should be built on top of, or over them. In latter years, the Sentani medicine-men smoked their coconut husk on top of the stone when somebody had to go to the hospital in town. This was done ‘in order to make the sick person well again, he needs “the blessing” of his ancestral stone-spirit’. The belief is in accordance with the function of the uaropo [the spirit]: they were also the ‘tutelary spirit’ or ‘guardian spirit’ of the village. The same kind of ritual had to be arranged when the men were going to hunt. The smoke of the coconut (husk), smouldering on top of the uaropo-stone, had to touch their bodies, in order to make them lucky and irresistible. It has become clear that nearly every remarkable spot or rock, rare in shape, or caves, have their uaropo.25

The villages, and the belief system of the people, have been established and controlled by the decree of the ancestral spirits, which over the years has come to be seen as ancestral Lo. The breaking of the ancestral Lo is always considered to be an act of sin. The Sentanians call this wrong action, uah peko mokoubeke (meaning: body wrong it

24 A woman in a village next to Sosirih had a big scar on her left arm from a crocodile bite. The crocodile released her when she called out the name Daimoi.

has been done). Sin or wrong action is something done with or in the body. To trespass on spirit abodes disrespectfully is to break the harmonious relationship with the *papa bilong graun* (the owner of the land). This breaking of the harmonious relationship is done with or in the body, hence the Sentanian concept of *uah peko mokoubeke*. The major idea represented by the concept is the breaking of relationship. Thus, *uah peko mokoubeke* speaks of one person doing what is wrong in or with the body with another person. The wrong done by the two people constitutes the breaking of the ancestral *Lo*. In this way *uah peko mokoubeke* implicates the community and the ancestors. The wrong action done in the body, or with the body, cuts off the relationship between the ancestors and the community, whose responsibility it is to uphold the ancestral *Lo*.

The ancestral *Lo* established by the ancestors provides for the basic needs of the people. It does not, however, provide for the eternal security of the Sentanians. In one collection of oral stories, Kamma has found the traditional view that Sentani people originated from the mountain Dovonsero or Dobonsoro.\(^{26}\) In this story he tells about a brother and a sister who married each other and lived with their father. One day the father died but came back to life the next day. The children recognized him and realized that he must know the secret to eternal life. The father, however, was not able to communicate the secret to them. He then ‘tried to share the secret with the animals: snakes, spiders, and all other animals which are now able to cast off their old skin’.\(^{27}\) The father succeeded in passing on the secret to the animals, but in doing so he lost the secret for himself and for humans. As a consequence, after some time he died, and ‘The secret of eternal life went with him into the grave’.\(^{28}\)

The Sentanians are convinced that the environment surrounding the lake, the people, and the animal world, have all originated from the spirits. My informant, Jacob Dike, a man in his 70s, and Philipus Daimoi, aged 48, spoke about the woman Ajchoi, who as one married to a snake, provided the Sentanians with life and prosperity. Dike, the older man, one of the two men whom the people of Sosirih regard as their fathers, as he passed on this piece of family heritage to me, spoke about Ajchoi and the snake with deep reverence and awe. Because the information was of a sacred and secret nature, being a family source of wealth and health, he leaned over closely to me and whispered their names into my ear so that no one else could hear the name Ajchoi and

\(^{26}\) *Ibid.*, 68.


the snake. The story is an important family heritage, because one of our aunts was named Ajechoi, most likely named after the woman Ajechoi of this story. The story must be one of the Sentanians' gems, known to all the Sentanian communities. Kamma, who did his research in middle Sentani, has fully documented the story 'The Woman of the East and the Snake of Heaven', and did it well.²⁹

According to Kamma, the story of the woman Ajechoi has her from the east, (perhaps from one of the villages on the Papua New Guinea side of the border), yet she 'drifted off to sea floating on some driftwood'.³⁰ For months she drifted on her driftwood in the westerly direction, until one day a strong surf washed her onto the beach with her driftwood, landing her 'near the burned rock, south of present-day Ormu'.³¹ Ormu is a village in a north-westerly direction from Sentani, in the district of Tanahmerah. The woman Ajechoi scrambled up the beach, and after some time searching for a place in which to live to live, she found a cave where she stayed for a while. Every day she sat at the entrance to the cave thinking of the place and the people she had left behind, longing to return to her place of origin and her people. Her heart became sad. She composed songs complaining of her present ordeal: no food, no clothing, no human being to accompany her. Maiwa – a snake of heaven, heard her song of sorrow, descended to the cave, and began to live with Ajechoi as a companion. The two got married. One day, Maiwa discovered that Ajechoi was pregnant. Upon this development, Maiwa left Ajechoi and returned to heaven, but he descended again when Ajechoi was about to deliver. He assisted Ajechoi who gave birth firstly to a lot of grass, then a snake named Mugu, then, in quick succession, to every kind of big and small animal. After this, the snake father stopped his wife from bearing more. He advised the animals, and ordered them to go and hide in the forest and under the trees. 'All of you go hide in the forest, the dust of the soil will be your food. Take cover under the trees.' To the snake he said, 'Don't bite human beings who call you brother, because then you have nothing to fear. But if they say nothing at all they have to die (then you are allowed to bite)'.

Maiwa went back to his wife, then she continued to bear again. She gave birth to four human beings, two pairs of twins, two girls and two boys. The boys were named Awi and Nafri. The names of the girls are sacred (but both are named Baal). Because

²⁹ Ibid., 69-71.
³⁰ Ibid., 69.
³¹ Ibid., 70.
there were no other human beings around, the boys married their own sisters. They had many children who intermarried each other. As time went on there was not enough room for them all to live in one place, so they began to move to the west, the east, and the north.

This story again highlights the fact that the Sentanians see themselves and their world controlled and influenced by the spirits. This story, and the others discussed above, form the basis of the Sentani world-view. The Sentani view of the community, therefore, is of one holistically-integrated community, consisting of people, pigs, and dogs, wild animals, mountains and jungles, rivers and waters, the living and the dead, and animate and inanimate entities. To be a Sentanian is to live in a harmonious relationship with the entire cosmic world to which they belong.

4:4:2 Summary
The Sentanian world we have seen thus far is a spirit-dominated world. The beautifully clear fresh-water lake, and the people who live along, it originated from the spirits. Stories of their origin tell us that the Sentanians belong to the earth, the water, and the sky. Their view of a human being, we found, is very much spirit-dominated also. The first ancestors set up the pattern for Sentanian communal life. The Sentanian community structure and leadership pattern will now be discussed.

4:5 THE STRUCTURE OF THE COMMUNITY OF THE PEOPLE OF SENTANI
The Sentanian community is one integrated holistic entity, blessed and established by the ancestral spirits, who are part of the community. Being a patrilineal community, the leadership is male-oriented. The leadership is hereditary rather than by achievement. As decreed by Mahowe, the ancestral spirit, the first-born son of the family automatically inherits his father's position at the time the father determines, or when the father dies. To understand the Sentanian community structure, we will look at the structure and leadership of a given Sentanian village.

4:5:1 The Structure of a Sentanian Village
The Sentanians live in hamlets along the edge of the lake. Their homes are built on stilts over the lake. Traditionally, their houses were built out of bush material, such as thatched sago leaves for the roof, dry sago ribs for walls, and split and smoothed wild
palm or sago palm trees for the floor. One of these houses would normally last for about 20 years.

A village may have seven clans or more. The people live together side-by-side, grouped in their clans. Several clans make up one tribe. The head of the clan is called kosero, and the leader of the tribe, or the entire village, is ondoporo. The ondoporo kabang, or the chief ondoporo, has jurisdiction over his village and the region. As Lake Sentani is naturally divided into east, middle, and west, one ondoporo kabang rules over each part of the lake. Since the ondoporo's position is an hereditary one, a village can have more than one ondoporo.

A Sentanian village has always had a well-defined social structure, which functions as the basis for decision-making and other social interactions. A village normally has several tribes, or political units, consisting of several clans, with several family units or lineages belonging to each clan. A Sentanian village, like all other Melanesian settlements, is more than a decision-making place; it represents the history of the people, its customs, and its religious practices.

I will now use my own village, Sosirih, to discuss the structure and leadership pattern of the villages in general. Sosirih is located at the western-most end of Lake Sentani.

In 1960, the year I left for studies overseas, our village had a population of between 300 to 400 people. The village consists of two moieties, or political units, with three tribal groups (see 4:5:6 below). The largest tribal group is called Wangkidewari, or the Enok tribe, with five clans. The other two tribes are unitedly called Oisou-Waisei tribes. These two tribes are related to each other. The Oisou, or the Entong tribe, has three clans. The Waisei tribe has four: Daimoi, Dike, Elitetena, and Tungkoe. The two ‘political parties’ – Wangkidewari and Oisou-Waisei – constitute marriage partners. The existence of an intertribal marriage pattern allows for a closely-knitted family relationship to be enjoyed by all. The people know each other, and belong to each other. Children are cared for by their paternal and maternal relatives, and are related to the totems of their parents.

The villagers participate freely in many community activities. When, as an example, the Wangkidewari tribe wants a house or canoe built, its responsibility is to provide food and refreshment, but the house or the canoe will be built by the Oisou-Waisei tribe. The process is reversed when a house or a canoe is to be built for the Oisou-Waisei tribe. These rules are not hard and fast. Families from either party can
always help in providing food and refreshment, or in assisting with the building work. The emphasis is more on community solidarity rather than on sticking to one’s tribal group.

4:5:2 Marriage Arrangements

Regarding the undertaking of marriage, the established ancestral Lo guides and controls the procedure. Thus the people know whom they can or cannot marry. There is freedom for people to marry, or be married, to someone from outside their village. Marriage is a community or tribal undertaking. Everyone belonging to the tribe is expected to contribute to the bride price. In the past, all of the bride price was paid in traditional money made of carefully-shaped stone rings of different sizes and values. The biggest and dearest in value is called eba (a big stone ring). In addition to eba are the following traditional monies in their descending order of value: kebari, tepah, tawah, with the lowest in value being tahye. The eba belongs to the ondoporo or chief, symbolizing his high position and glory. When the marriage of the ondoporo’s first-born son occurs, the relatives of the woman expect one or two eba as payment for their daughter. When the ondoporo’s eldest daughter gets married, payment has to be made in eba, symbolizing the dignity and the honour which belong to the ondoporo’s daughter. The eba represents political status. It cannot be given out without the consent of the village elders. Food and other gifts are also given at the time of marriage, but these are not regarded as part of the bride price.

4:5:3 The Houses

In the past, long houses were built for each clan. One of these houses would accommodate between eight to ten families. The house had internal cooking places for each family. These cooking places, and a family room, separated the families from each other. The head of the long house, or the clan, is called kosero (see below for details). Depending on its size, a tribe would have several of these long houses. In Sentani, the men lived together with their families in these long houses. Separate houses were built for the bachelors to sleep in together at night. They were often joined by the elders, who instructed them in the Lo of the community. A tribe has several kosero, and one ondoporo. The long houses have disappeared for good. Nowadays, each family is expected to have its own house. Traditional Sentani houses were build of bush material with thatched sago leaves for roofs, dried sago ribs for walls, split and smoothed sago
trees, or mature wild palm trees, for the floors, and strong ebony (*toam*) and iron-trees for the posts. All the houses were built on stilts or posts over the water at the edge of the lake. These houses would last 20 years or more. The houses of the *kosero* and the *ondoporo* used to be marked by one or two *koses*, respectively. A *kose* is a smoothly-sharpened roof-beam at one end of the house. The house of the *ondoporo* is called *Yoime-Daloime/Yoime-Raloime*, meaning a house of the village, or common or public house. The name signifies the fact that the house of the *ondoporo* belongs to all, a resting and refreshing place for strangers, enemies, and the people of the village. No practice of sorcery, magic, or witchcraft is allowed in this house.

Several places had cultural or spirit houses, e.g., Asei and Ayapo (east Sentani), the island of Ajau (middle Sentani), and the island of Yonokhom or Kwadeware (west Sentani). The Sentanians call the spirit house, *Walofomau*, or the gate of the spirit, considered to be the power-house of the community, the dwelling place of the great ancestral spirit. These houses do not exist today.

![Image of Senitnian spirit house](image.png)

Plate 3: Sentanian spirit house (*Walofomau*).

(Reprinted from Jan H. Ramande, *Negeri Puyakha* [Clear Water Region] (Satya Jaya Jayapura: Dinas Pendidikan dan Pengajaran Dati I Irian Jaya, 1999).)

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4:5:4 Food
Sago porridge and fish is the staple diet of the Sentanians. Sago palms grow wild in swampy places. The men select a mature sago palm, cut it down, split it open into two halves, beat out the soft inner part into small powdery pieces with cylindrically shaped stone cutters about ten centimetres long, fixed to triangular-shaped handles about 80 to 90 centimetres long. The women squeeze the powdery pieces through a filter with water and collect the juice in a container. At the end of the day, the water is drained out of the container, and the white stuff that fills up the container is transferred into tightly-knitted string baskets and taken home. Some of this white stuff is then prepared in big clay bowls specially made for the purpose. Boiling water is poured into the bowls while the mixture is constantly stirred until it is cooked into a glue-like-porridge. This is then eaten with wooden forks, along with fish. The rest of the white stuff is kept in water in big clay containers to keep it fresh until needed. When kept in this way, sago can last for one month or more. When it runs out the people go out to the sago swamps to process more, as described above. As a staple diet, sago is supplemented with different types of garden produce such as: bananas, taro, yam, sweet potatoes, and different types of vegetables. As long as the people work hard to prepare sago, and plant their gardens, they have their basic necessities for life.

4:5:5 Transportation
Since the people live along the edges of the lake, the canoe is their major mode of travel from place to place. The people use two types of canoes: the smaller one, a one-man canoe, is for men, and the bigger one for women. The canoes are built from dug-out canoe trees from the jungle. The building of big canoes for women is a community task. While the men build the canoe, the women and youths provide food and refreshment. In the past, the canoes carried family or clan carvings, decorations and totems on the side or the front. The canoe of the ondoporo is the biggest and the best. It carries colourful decorations and carvings on both sides, with his clan or tribal totemic symbol carved on the prow. These decorations, carvings, and totemic symbols represent the history, the power, and the position of the ondoporo. This canoe is called yo-niki (the village dirt, that is, carrier of village concerns or burdens), a symbolic representation of the responsibility of the ondoporo as the representative of his people. The yo-niki or the ondoporo’s canoe belongs to the whole village, and is to be used for community
functions only. Wherever the canoe goes, the carvings, decorations, and totemic symbols tell the people the village it belongs to and its owner.

4:5:6 Leadership and Decision-Making

The authority and decision-making for the village rest with the village elders, known as kosero (or heads of the clans), the ondoporo (or heads of the village, tribes, or region), and the heads of the families. Today, all discussions are held in the village square, or in front of the house of the village-government representative – the ondowapi. In the past they were held out on the verandah (the obeh) of the ondoporo’s house. The fact that only the heads of families are involved in decision-making does not mean that men are the only ones making decisions. In all village undertakings women and youth become fully involved. Nothing can happen without their full participation. No community undertaking, such as a marriage, or the building of houses or canoes, can take place without the full participation of women and the youth. Before the ondoporo and the kosero make a final decision, women and the youth take part. They discuss the matters concerned with the head of their clans or families, who takes their thoughts to the gathering of the ondoporo and koseros.

Wives and mothers possess a great deal of authority and influence. Without a mother’s consent, her children cannot get married, or be given away in marriage. Some women (as discussed in chapter 2), possess magic for hunting, gardening, physical strength, and charms. For men to succeed in individual and or community undertakings, they must work in cooperation with the women.

Since the village or the community exists as one holistic entity, in making final decisions about crucial undertakings, the ondoporo and the koseros must have the full backing of the community. Because the ondoporo and the individual kosero can only represent a particular aspect of community life, a united decision by the whole community, known as a multi-individual-consensus, of opinion can bring the required result, thus keeping the harmony of the village intact. However, as discussed under the priesthood in the next chapter, decisions of a very secret nature can be made by the war-priest and his ondoporo, without consulting the community.

The foregoing discussion shows that the ondoporo, the kosero, and the heads of families, are responsible for the well-being of the village. A village may have several koseros, and one ondoporo, or no ondoporo at all, since the ondoporo is a village or regional representative. Our village of Sosirihi has four ondoporos, one of them is
**ondoporo kabang** (this position belongs to the Daimoi clan), 13 *koseros*, who are also heads of the clans (see diagram below). Each of the clans has several family heads. The *koseros* and the *ondoporos* are the decision-making elders of the village.

![Diagram of village authority]


**Figure 4:** The structure of village authority.

The diagram\(^{34}\) shows the two moieties, or political units, are made up of six clans that constitute the village of Sosirih. Clans 1 to 5 unitedly are known as the *oisou-waiset* moiety; clan 6 is known as the *Wankidewari* moiety. The Daimoi family (clan 1) has two family units, with two *koseros*, but one *ondoporo*. Clans 2 to 4 represent three separate clans, each having one *kosero*, but together are represented by one *ondoporo*; clans 5 and 6 each has four family units, with its own *kosero*, but represented by one *ondoporo*.\(^{35}\)

The *ondoporo* has the fullest power and authority in the community. At his installation, the *ondoporo* is presented with a belt of leadership, made of tree bark, called *Yomalo*,\(^{36}\) or *Yomaro*, as the emblem of his hereditary authority and leadership. The position of the *ondorphoro* has been decreed by Mahowe, the ancestral spirit. The *ondoporo* will always remain an *ondoporo*. At his death, his first-born son will automatically inherit his position as the *ondoporo*. The father can make way for his first-born son to become the *ondoporo* if the father wishes to do so. Further discussion on this is taken up in the next chapter of this thesis.

In addition to the *ondoporo* and the *kosero*, there are the priests who are also regarded as important leaders of the community. The priests are feared, and held in high honour by the community for their knowledge of sorcery, magic, and witchcraft.

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\(^{34}\) Copied from Daimoi, 'Nominalism', 37.


\(^{36}\) *Yomalo* consist of two words, *yo* = village, *malo* or *maro* = clothing or uniform. See Ramandeji, *Negeri Payakha*, 11.
The Sentanians have chief priests, military, mediatorial, medicinal, meteorological, and mortuary priests. All these priests, like all the *kosero*, operate according to the *kose* they belong to, under the direction of the *ondoporo*. The *ondoporo* is the chief executive, the apex of the community, the first among brothers. The chief priest is the *ondoporo*’s number-one executive-advisor. He holds the power to kill or to keep alive. He, in consultation with his *ondoporo*, can decide which one of their men will be delivered to their enemy to be killed in war. He can also kill his own people, but always with the consent and approval of the *ondoporo*. The military priest is responsible for the protection of his men, and the weakening and destruction of the enemy. The mediatory priest is endowed with negotiating ability. He is known as *ufoi* or *upoi* (*u* = body, *foi/poi* = good), and is also called *abu-ako* (messenger). Because his position requires him to mediate between his people and their enemies, the mediatory priest is recognized as the friend of both parties. Whenever he appears among enemies or an injured party, they must lay down their weapons and listen to him as he negotiates terms of settlement or otherwise. He is also responsible for marriage arrangements and the negotiation of a new place for the people to settle. The medicinal priest is endowed with healing or curative power. According to the ancestral *Lo*, when he carries out his practice he must burn coconut husk on an *uarofo* stone, called the ‘promise stone’, which the people regard as their guardian spirit. When a sick person is to be taken to the hospital in town, the medicinal priest burns a coconut husk. As the smoke from the coconut husk ascends and fills the house he utters magical words, ensuring healing for the sick, and invoking the guardian spirit to accompany the sick when he or she goes to the hospital (as they do nowadays). The meteorological priest is responsible for bringing in or sending away the rain. He is also responsible for shortening the night or prolonging it to allow travellers to reach their destination before sunrise. The mortuary priest sees to it that the spirit of those who die in accidents are properly sent off into the world of the dead. The spirits of those who die in accidents are feared most by the people. They can retaliate at any time to avenge their own deaths. In order to avoid this action, and other forms of calamity, the mortuary priest must effectively clear the community from being attacked by the retaliatory spirit. He does this by carrying out an exorcism. If a person dies from falling from a tree, the mortuary priest would go to the place where the person died. He would set a fire, and heap up both dry and green leaves over the fire. As the smoke ascends and fills the jungle, he would utter an incantation to farewell the spirit of the dead into the world of the dead. He is also expected to carry out another act of exorcism
in the village as discussed previously. At the village, all the villagers, adults and children, would be called to stand in ankle- or knee-deep water by the house of the dead with leaves in their hands. As the priest utters the incantation and smashes the surface of the water, all the people wash their legs and arms with the leaves in their hands to cleanse themselves from the deadly influence of the dead person’s spirit.

The different categories of priests are expected to operate in line with the kose they represent. Each one of the priests occupies a unique position, and has a unique service to perform. To interfere with another priest’s function is to breach the ancestral Lo. This constitutes a serious offence, and calls for a recognized compensatory act to avoid disputes and confrontation.

The effectiveness of the priestly ministry is dependent on the blessings associated with the kose to which each priest belongs. These blessings are the gifts from the ancestors who are represented by the kose. These blessings are spiritual gifts, since they come from the spirits. They are comparable to spiritual gifts mentioned in the Bible. These gifts are part of Melanesian spirituality, and are compatible with Biblical teaching. These gifts do not vanish when a priest, or kosero, or ondoporo, or their descendants, become Christian. These gifts are the individual’s endowment from the spirits for the proper exercise of his office to benefit the whole community. This is what is meant by ancestral hereditary blessing. The ancestral hereditary blessings accompany the first-born son of ondoporo, and kosero for the execution of their functions as war leaders, fighters, hunters, healers, peacemakers, weather controllers, etc. They were destined to receive and make use of the blessings associated with their kose. If a person fails to manifest the characteristics of the blessings of his hereditary endowment he is supposed to have, the other community leaders can replace him with another member of the same kose, perhaps the leader’s younger brother. The office and the function of the kose belong together, one complements and affirms the other as a sure sign to the community of the ancestral approval and appointment.

Two other points to be discussed under the leadership structure here are: the community view of the ondoporo and his first-born son, and the community view of the kose.

4:5:7 The Community View of the Ondoporo and His First-born Son
The community sees the ondoporo as the Yo-doo Yan-doo (village-man, roof-man). This means the community sees the ondoporo possessing the fullest authority. When he
appears, everyone must sit down in honour of him. When he speaks, everyone must hear and obey. The first-born son of the ondopororo is viewed by the community as the yopa-yangpa (child of the village, or the ground, and child of the roof, or the above). He is also known as waribuna-naribunapa (child of the life-giving water, and child of the water-spirit). As the yopa-yangpa, the first-born of the ondopororo is the base and the height of the community or the village. He is the foundation and the head of the community. He occupies the fullest power and authority in the community. He is the apex of the community structure. No one is higher than him. When he appears, everyone must sit down in honour of him. When he speaks, they must listen and obey. His designation as the waribuna-naribunapa, speaks of the yopa-yangpa's origin, which is derived from the world of the spirits. The waribuna-naribunapa identifies yopa-yangpa as the agent of the life-giving water-spirit, the agent of peace and prosperity. The significance of this is that, in Sentani thinking, the ondopororo is the friend of all the people, his people, the outsiders, and the enemy of his people. The home of the ondopororo, and therefore the home of his first-born the yopa-yangpa, belongs to all, and is therefore open to all kinds of people. The home of the ondopororo is the resting place—a safe haven for friends and foes alike. The ondopororo's first-born is the mediator of all the people. Once the enemy of his people enters his house, his people must lay down their weapons; they cannot fight or kill their enemies while they are under the protection of their ondopororo. What they must do is to be responsible for the well-being of their enemies, they must feed them, care for them, and see them depart peacefully. To touch the enemy while he is in the home of the ondopororo is to place oneself under the curse of the spirits who have installed the ondopororo as the waribuna-naribunapa.

The ondopororo, as one possessing the rank of royalty, had servants or messengers, or personal helpers, known as abu-ako. One of them was called maunai abu-ako, or the door-keeper, his job was to welcome and introduce the guests to the ondopororo; another one, called kangkenai abu-ako, was the keeper of the string-bag, that is, keeper of the wealth, or the ondopororo's treasurer; another one was called etamangnai abu-ako, or provider of hospitality, food and drink; another one was in charge of refreshment or entertainment, known as bee-apenai abu-ako, or provider of betelnut, and smoke. Betelnut-chewing and smoking were popular ways to entertain the guests.
4:5:8 The Kose in Sentani Culture

The kose, in the minds of Sentanians, is the check mechanism for disputes and confrontations. The kose determines a man’s position and function in the community or village. The kose represents the hereditary blessings sanctioned by the spirits. The kose under which a man is born gives him his standing and authority in the community. The kose enshrines the future blessings of the new generation. The kose, for the Sentanians, embodies the history and the cosmos to which the individual belongs. In a patrilineal society, as the Sentanians have, a man’s kose tells him who he is, the role he is destined to play in the community, where his sago and betelnut palms are, or his gardening and hunting grounds, and fishing water. The destiny of his life is the inheritance he received from the kose he belongs to. When the ondoporo functions properly, according to the kose to which he belongs, his ministry will bless and benefit the community. When the community sees this, it will say ‘he is sitting well’, or ‘he is sitting in his rightful place’, that is to say, he is doing his work well because he is occupying the right position sanctioned by his ancestral spirits. The hereditary or ancestral blessings flow through him because the kose has sanctioned him. A village can have more than one ondoporo, depending on its size, or its ancestral history. In this case, the village will have ondoporo kabang (the big chief or first ondoporo) and ondoporo mera or kending (small or vice-ondoporo).

Apart from the ondoporo, the kosero is also a community leader. The position of the kosero is also based on the same tradition as that of the ondoporo, for the position of the kosero is also a hereditary one. Kamma says the kosero is the leader of the common people. He is not related to the ondoporo. His people are the common, free people. I would disagree with Kamma, since the ondoporo is also the kosero of his clan, and there is really no distinction. It all depends on their hereditary positions. The kosero assists the ondoporo in caring for the community. The hereditary position is the basis for Sentanian leadership. This is the pattern for the exercise of leadership in the Sentanian community, a pattern sanctioned by the ancestral spirits.

4:5:9 Summary

We summarize the Sentanian structure of the community by saying that the Sentanians, like other Melanesians, live in a well-ordered community. Their communal interrelationships are determined and guided by their ancestral Lo. Sentanian leadership is hereditarily determined. Under patrilineal traditions, this leadership is passed down
from the father to his first-born son. The first-born sons in turn pass down the leadership to their first-born. The ondoporo holds the fullest authority, assisted by the kosero. The Sentanian culture discussed here provided the people with the basis for belief and practice. It provided the people with the basis for evaluating other religions, like Christianity, our next discussion point.

4:6 CHRISTIANITY AND SENTANIAN CULTURE

The mission work of West Papua came about as the result of the Pietistic movement in Germany in the 17th and 18th centuries led by ‘August Francke and the University of Halle in Germany, which spread to Germany, and thence to the Netherlands in the form of revival. The movement resulted in the establishment of missions in Europe and the trading and colonial posts overseas, because,

The Pietist church leaders believed that they, as leaders of the religion of the conquering and, as they saw it, civilizing power, had a God-given opportunity and responsibility to care and evangelize these territories with whatever tools they possessed, including that of the authority and the military and economic might of the conquering power, if such cooperation could be acquired.

The Gospel was brought to West Papua by the Dutch Reformed Church as the result of this Pietist movement. The first two missionaries, Carl Ottow and Johan Geissler, arrived on the island of Mansinam near Manokwari in the Geelvink Bay on 5 February 1855. They prayed and claimed all of present-day West Papua for God, saying, ‘In the name of God we set foot on this land’. These first two missionaries were followed by others from ‘Germany, and later by Dutch, Amboinese, and Sangerese missionaries, who established mission stations in the surrounding areas, and later in other places of West Papua.

Thus the message of the Gospel has been preached in West Papua for almost 150 years. Although it took the first two missionaries 25 years of hard work before they baptized the first man and woman, Christianity is now the way of the people’s life.

As with so many other communities in West Papua, the Sentanians have welcomed the Gospel, which was brought to them in 1927. The first pastor-teacher,

37 David John Neilson, ‘Christianity in Irian (West Papua)’, A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, School of Studies in Religion, University of Sydney, January 2000, 43.
38 Ibid., 43.
39 Ibid., 43, 45.
40 Ibid., 43.
Barnabas Jufuay, from the village of Tablanusu of Tanah Merah (to the north-west of Sentani), was sent by the Dutch Reformed Church to commence work in Sentani. The ondoporo of the middle of Sentani, on the advice of his elders, rejected him. The reason for rejecting him was his hair. Barnabas Jufuay had the same kind of hair as the Sentanians. The people did not accept him as a true teacher or missionary.

A true teacher or missionary in the mind of the Sentanians is one with long wavy hair! Jufuay was returned to his home place. A teacher-pastor, Daud Pekadeh, from Sanger on the island of Celebes in Indonesia, was sent to Sentani to replace Barnabas Jufuay. Daud Pekadeh was welcomed by the Sentanians and he started to work on the island of Ajau in middle Sentani. Later, more teacher-pastors were sent to Sentani from the islands of Ambon and Celebes in Indonesia, and so Christianity spread out, firstly to the eastern, then to the western, part of Sentani.

For over 100 years, the Dutch Reformed Church on the north coast, and the Dutch Roman Catholic Church on the south coast, had all of the coastal areas of West Papua to themselves to propagate the Gospel.

The Dutch Reformed Church used a teacher-pastor system to spread Christianity on the north coast. These teacher-pastors were men trained as school teachers who also received some Bible training. They were especially trained in understanding the catechism, which sets out the basic doctrines of the Christian faith, as understood and propagated by the Dutch Reformed Church. The main work of the teacher-pastors was teaching in the village schools from Monday to Friday. On Sundays they would lead the service and preach. The majority of them preached from the material they were taught or exposed to during their teacher-training days. Petrus Bonyadone, one of my informants, has reflected that these teachers did their best, although they had had no new-birth experience in their lives.

Jesus explained new birth as being ‘born again’ (Jn 3:3), or being ‘born of water and the Spirit’ (Jn 3:5). Without the experience of new birth, no one can enter the kingdom of God, or come under the rule of God, or become a member of the family of God (Jn 1:12). The Greek word another, translated ‘born again’, can also mean ‘from above’. The new birth experience is a supernatural endowment from above. ‘In its initial stage, the process of changing a person into a child of God precedes conversion

41 Chairman of Evangelism, Gereja Kema Injil Indonesia, Irian Jaya, in an interview with me on 16 November, 2000, at CLTC, Banz, Western Highland Province, Papua New Guinea.
and faith'. In the Gospels, water and Spirit are linked with baptism (Mt 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16; Jn 1:22,26,31). Baptism by water without the cleansing work of the Holy Spirit is inadequate to become a child of God. Barrett thinks ‘water’ may also stand for physical birth. As physical birth brings a person into an earthly family, birth by the Spirit is the way into the family of God.

For the apostle Paul, the experience of new birth is symbolized by the opening of the eyes, and turning ‘from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God’, in order to ‘receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in [Jesus]’ (Acts 26:18). This concept of new birth calls for a radical transformation at the root of a person’s belief-system or world-view. Kraft says, ‘a people’s world-view is their basic model of reality’. A people’s world-view stands for the way the people explain, evaluate, reinforce, integrate, and determine the influences they see in the world in which they live. The Melanesian world-view presented in this thesis is an ancestor- or spirit-dominated world-view. New birth, or conversion, at the Melanesian world-view level for the people, means transferring their reliance on, and faith in, the power of their ancestors for their daily needs to loyalty to, and faith in, Jesus Christ. This understanding is reflected by Figure 5a and Figure 5b on page 232, and is discussed more fully in chapter six.

Many of the teacher-pastors sent into the villages by the Dutch Reformed Church lack this dynamic transformation, or conversion experience. This made it difficult for many to pass on the experiential truths of the Gospel. This being the case, the people to whom they ministered continued to hold on to their traditional faith while attending church services regularly, as discussed below.

My own experience would support Bonyadone’s comments. Coming from the Calvinistic, background with a strong emphasis on covenant relationship, the Dutch Reformed Church did a very good work in teaching about faith as a covenant relationship with God.

The Sentanians, like other West Papuans engaged with the Dutch Reformed Church, saw Christianity as a matter of church attendance and church membership. Many did not know, and still do not know, what it means to have faith in God. Many

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43 Hendrickson, St. John, 133.
44 Barrett, St. John, 175.
46 Ibid., 54-56.
Sentanians considered themselves to be Christians, but saw no reason for giving up the practice of magic and sorcery. Many still see Christianity and the practice of magic as being two ways with the same end-view result. They attend church services on Sunday, but from Monday to Saturday they continue with many traditional practices that one would not expect to be part of the Christian way. The people have not seen the need for giving away magic and sorcery practices. What I observed in 1989 gives support to what has been expressed. After being away from home (Sentani) for 29 years, I took my family over to Sentani from Papua New Guinea for a three weeks’ vacation. While staying in my younger brother’s house, my attention was drawn to the posts on which my brother’s house was built. The strong posts brought down from the mountains were planted deep into the foundation of the lake. The roots, or the bases of these strong posts, the parts which normally should have gone to the bottom of the lake have been turned upside down. The cross-beams on which the floor of the house is built were supported by the root, or the base parts, of these strong posts. When I asked how these posts were removed from the mountains to the village, my brother said, ‘Your uncles used their knowledge. They gave strength to their sons to uproot the strong trees for posts from the ground. They cut off the top ends and carried them to the village to build this house for me. I am sitting on the strength, knowledge, and wisdom of our uncles. Our uncles have placed me on the foundation of their ancestors.’ I understood what my younger brother said. Our maternal uncles had used magic to give power and strength to their sons to uproot the trees for posts to build the house for their sister’s son. Our uncles have called on their ancestors to give strength to their sons to uproot the trees for posts.47

Our uncles and the people in our village have been under the influence of the Gospel for over 70 years, but have not put away the practice of magic and sorcery. They have attended church services Sunday after Sunday. They have taken holy communion many times. They have prayed to God. And yet they have not put away the practice of magic and sorcery. The people still look to their ancestors to meet their need. They still use magic for hunting, fishing, gardening, marriage, and, for many

47 In the mind of Sentanians, the ondoporo holds the highest social, religious, economic, and political position. It is the duty of the ondoporo to provide for his family and others in the community. The home of the ondoporo belongs to all the people, including their enemies. For my brother to live in a house blessed by our maternal uncles means he has been accepted and blessed by our maternal ancestors. Since our paternal ancestral authority belongs to me as the first-born son, our maternal uncles had extended their authority and blessing to him.
other purposes. What is true of the people of Sosirih could be repeated in every village in Sentani.

The fact that Neilson has noted 15 references to traditional beliefs in chapter 11 alone of his thesis suggests that the phenomenon is alive and well, both in Papua New Guinea and in West Papua.48

To present Christianity meaningfully in order to achieve long-lasting impact on the Sentanians, the Christian message needs to establish a meaningful relationship between the Gospel and the Sentanians ancestors, such as, Mahowe and Tariaka, Ajechoi and Maiwa, Warowo, Ufoi, and Ohe. The people continue to look to these spirit-ancestors as their gods, their source of wealth and health, or gutpela sindaun.

4:6:1 New Changes Around the Sentani Area

West Papua has undergone unprecedented changes in the last 40 years. Neilson has rightly observed, ‘[t]he world of yesterday is gone forever’49 Great changes have taken place around Bu-Yakala or Lake Sentani. In 1989, when I took my family over there for a vacation, I could not recognize my own village. It has grown smaller. Many people have gone to their gardening and hunting areas, and built their houses there to protect their ancestral ground from being occupied by immigrants from other Indonesian islands. Many fruit trees, which used to provide us with an abundance of fruit, have been wiped out once-for-all. They were destroyed, along with many sago, coconut, and betel nut palms, in the process of building a sealed road from the township of Sentani, going over the hills above our village, to an inland town called Genyem.

Whilst many Sentanians sold some of their land to the immigrants, the majority refused to trade in their ancestral grounds, their source of wealth and health. A new fishing method, introduced by the immigrants for fishing in Lake Sentani, may empty the lake of its fish stocks in years to come. This will impact on people’s livelihoods, unless the lake is replenished with new species which will survive, otherwise the lake will be alive with crocodiles which will swallow up whatever comes near them. Travelling from the border between Papua New Guinea and West Papua down to Jayapura, one can see hard-working immigrant farmers who have turned traditional hunting and gardening grounds into rice fields and fish ponds. The cry for land

48 Neilson, ‘Christianity in Irian (West Papua)’, 325-327.
49 Ibid., 317.
compensation, such as we hear about on a daily basis in Papua New Guinea, just does not exist over there.

The official transmigration policy continues to bring in new immigrants, both Christians and Muslims. This has boosted the numbers of both groups. In most of the urban centres, church buildings and mosques stand side-by-side. Whilst Christians and Muslims are allowed to convert non-Christians to their respective faiths, Christians are not allowed to convert Muslims to Christianity. The transmigration policy is a source of discontent. Local Christians continue to do their best to accommodate the newcomers.\(^50\)

The OPM movement, which represents the voice of the people to the outside world, continues to exist, but is not as effective as it used to be because the people’s cries for self-identity have fallen on deaf ears amongst the country’s leaders.

There is no hiding the fact that West Papua has become an Asian country. The presence of immigrants, and the impact of their activities, are most noticeable in all the urban areas. All exports and imports are in the hands of foreigners.\(^51\) In the face of these kinds of situations, Papuans are learning to create a peaceful atmosphere for better interaction with each other. With traditional beliefs being so persuasive throughout the Sentani area, and the country as a whole, the people may resort to magic and sorcery as their only means of salvation in the future.

It will be important, therefore, for the Christian church in West Papua to join hands together to find ways to contextualize the Gospel in order to present Jesus as ‘the Way, the Truth, and the Life’ (Jn 14:6). The words of J. C. Mamoribo should encourage the Christians of West Papua in their work of evangelism:

\[
\text{... perjuangan Injil Kristus ... citanah ini belum berakhir, sementara Injil harus diperhadapkan dengan masyarakat Irian yang telah dijamah era modernisasi dan globalisasi.\(^52\)}
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4:7 SUMMARY

As in all Melanesian societies, the key to Sentanian community life and spirituality is their ancestors, Mahowe, Tariake, Taime, Marweri, Ufoi, and others. The Sentanians continue to hold them in high honour. In times of extremity the people still turn to them for help and direction. By now, the Sentanians have been under the influence of

\(^{50}\) Ibid., n. 3, page 318.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., n. 5, page 318.

\(^{52}\) ‘... the struggle of the Gospel of Christ ... in this land has not yet ended, so the Gospel should be brought into confrontation with the people of Irian, who are facing modernization and globalization’ (cited in Neilson, ‘Christianity’, 317.)
Christianity for well over 70 years or more. How does Christianity relate to these ancestors who are believed to have installed the ongaporas and the koseros of the community? What is the relationship between Jesus Christ and the ancestors of the Sentani people? This issue is taken up in the next chapter, using the Epistle to the Hebrews as a case study.
CHAPTER FIVE

CASE STUDY OF HEBREWS

5:1 INTRODUCTION

The New Testament Epistle to the Hebrews, as we have already heralded, is used in this thesis as the most missiologically-relevant Scriptural work for relating Christianity to Melanesian tradition. Whilst many things about this Epistle are difficult to determine, what we are sure about is that its content is deeply rooted in the Old Testament. This would mean that the recipients of the Epistle were a group of people who were very familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures. This would therefore suggest a strong case for a Jewish readership rather than a Gentile one. However Jewish the Epistle may be though, the central message of Hebrews is about Jesus Christ, who is God’s final message and messenger to the world, as can be seen from the opening assertion that, ‘in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son’ (1:2). In a more specific way, the message of the Epistle is about the High-Priestly ministry of Jesus from the throne of grace in heaven on behalf of God’s people, be they Jews or Gentiles. And, as Kistemaker writes,

We may assume that the Epistle, although written to a specific congregation originally, was intended for the church universal. The message conveyed is addressed to the church of all ages and places. To put it differently, if there is any epistle in the New Testament that addresses the church universal in the days prior to Jesus’ return, it is the Epistle to the Hebrews.¹

For the purpose of this thesis, the case study of Hebrews is centred on the High-Priesthood of Jesus. The Priesthood of Jesus will be discussed in relation to the Melanesian priesthood. Since Jesus is the central core of the Gospel or Christianity, as indicated in chapter three of this thesis, this will allow us to draw a comparison between Jesus as High Priest and Melanesian priests. The comparison drawn between the two priesthoods will help us to determine whether the Priesthood of Jesus is relevant for Melanesians. If it is, how does Jesus qualify to be a relevant Priest for Melanesians?

¹ Simon J. Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary: Exposition on the Epistle to the Hebrews (Grand
The discussion on the Priesthood of Jesus will be done in four parts:

- Jesus the High Priest
- The Priesthood in Melanesia and the Priesthood of Jesus
- Jesus the Priest is the Sacrifice
- Jesus the High Priest is the First-born Son of God

5:2 JESUS THE HIGH PRIEST

Jesus, by His life, death, and mediatory work, established an eternal solidarity between God and the community of faith. 'Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. 'He says, "I will declare Your name to My brothers, and in the presence of the congregation I will sing Your praises." And again, "I will put My trust in Him." And again He says, "Here am I, and the children God has given Me"' (2:11-13). Jesus became the brother of all believers on the basis of His sacrificial death on the cross, which is introduced in the Epistle’s first chapter with the statement, ‘After He had provided purification for sins’ (1:3). What Jesus accomplished for human sin is expounded in Hebrews in relation to His work as the High Priest of His people. What the Old Testament high Priests could not do, Jesus did once-and-for-all, and so we read, ‘Unlike the other high priests, He does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, firstly for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once-for-all when He offered Himself’ (7:27).

Within the Epistle itself, the Priesthood of Jesus is introduced in relation to Melchizedek, a solitary figure in the Old Testament, about whom nothing much is said, apart from two brief mentions about him (Gen 14:18-20; Ps 110:4). This does not in any way demean the greatness of Melchizedek, as Hughes so clearly states:

Herein lies the greatness of Melchizedek . . . He is one who stands quite above the entire structure of Law and Priesthood, dependent on neither legal authorization nor Levitical descent, and yet acknowledged as superior by none other than Father Abraham.²

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Hebrews uses Melchizedek to establish the basis for Jesus to operate as a Priest from outside the Levitical tribe. The priesthood of Melchizedek came into existence some 400 years prior to the establishment of the Levitical priesthood. Although Melchizedek appeared and disappeared from the pages of Scripture after his meeting with Abraham, Hebrews draws on this priesthood in a big way to establish the Priesthood of Jesus. Hebrews presents Melchizedek as a natural and supranatural person, in that, even though he appeared to Abraham as an ordinary human being, he has no human genealogy, no parental connections, no beginning and end of his life; but, ‘like the Son of God he remains a priest forever’ (7:1-3). And so, the case study of Hebrews, while focussing on the Priesthood of Jesus, needs to deal with the relationship between Melchizedek and Jesus. Even before that, though, the Epistle challenges us to consider Jesus’ solidarity with humanity through His Priestly ministry.

5:2:1 Jesus’ Solidarity With Humanity Through His High-Priestly Ministry

The High Priesthood of Jesus highlights His deep eternal solidarity with the human community. Christ’s solidarity with the community as its High Priest is introduced and developed in 2:16-18; 4:14-5:10 and 7:1-28. The argument in Hebrews runs that Jesus’ death on the cross purified the community of its sins (1:3), identifies Him with the people as their Brother, and establishes the basis for His merciful and faithful ministry as High Priest in service to God (2:17). As the Apostle and High Priest of the community of faith (3:1), He makes God known to the people. Faith in Him is the basis by which the community enters into solidarity with Him and receives an unhindered access into God’s presence (4:14).

For Jesus’ solidarity with the community as its High Priest to be meaningful, He must meet all the qualifications for priesthood stipulated in the law. To be a high priest one must be a genuine human being, selected from among men (5:1); he must offer gifts and sacrifices for the sins of the people, offer (5:1); he must be thoughtful and understanding, be able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray (5:2); he must be called by God as Aaron was (5:4). Christ fully met all these stipulations one-by-one, according to this line of reasoning in 5:6-10. Beginning with the last stipulation, the writer points out that God called Jesus to be a High Priest, ‘So Christ also did not take upon Himself the glory of becoming a High Priest. But God said to Him, “You are My Son; today I have become Your Father. And He says in another place, You are a Priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek” ’ (5:5-6). The
stipulation about the high priest being a genuine human being is answered with the statement, ‘During the days of Jesus’ life on earth’ (5:7). Jesus’ qualification for offering gifts and sacrifices is stated as: ‘He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears’ (5:7). While Jesus had no sins of His own to cause Him to offer up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears, His solidarity with the human community, and as the true representative of humankind on the cross, He not only carried their sins, but as Paul says, ‘God made Him who had no sin to be sin (emphasis mine) for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God’ (2 Cor 5:21). Finally, Jesus’ ability to be thoughtful and understanding is represented by such statements as: ‘loud cries and tears’; ‘He was heard because of His reverent submission’; ‘although He was a Son, He learned obedience from what He suffered’ (5:7-8; cf. 2:18; 4:15).

As well as meeting the stipulations for the high-priestly ministry point by point, Hebrews goes one step further by pointing out that Jesus is a better High Priest because: He is the Son of God, ‘although He was a Son’ (5:8); a perfect High Priest, once made perfect (5:9); and by His total obedience to the Father’s will, He has become the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him (5:9). In consequence of His full solidarity with humanity, and His utter obedience to the Father’s will, God designated Him to be a High Priest in the order of Melchizedek (5:10).

Jesus is fully qualified to be the High Priest of the community by fully meeting all the requirements for high-priesthood stipulated by the law under which the Aaronic high-priesthood operated. As pointed out, Jesus also had other qualifications which made Him superior to the Aaronic high priests. Thus, Jesus is spoken of as a High Priest in the order of Melchizedek, the topic of the discussion to follow.

5:2:2 **Solidarity Through Melchizedek**

Whilst Melchizedek is mentioned only twice in the Old Testament (Gen 14:18-20; Ps 110:4), Hebrews provides some important information about his solidarity with the community of faith. When Melchizedek received a tenth from Abraham, he received that part which the Levitical priests were required to collect from their brothers as the Lord’s offering (7:7; Lev 27:30-34; Num 18:26-29). When he received a tenth from Abraham, Melchizedek played the role assigned to the Levites, and in so doing he accepted Abraham as his country-man. Melchizedek’s acceptance of the tithes, and
Abraham’s spontaneous offering of the tenth, brings them into solidarity with each other. And as Hughes has observed,

The issue is finally clinched with the argument from Hebraic solidarity principles (verses 9ff). Because Levi can, according to this mode of thinking, be identified in principle with his great-grandfather. Abraham’s action and attitude stand representatively for those of his offspring, including Levi and his priestly clan. Here the thrust of the argument, which began in verse 4 in specifying Abraham as ‘patriarch’, is brought to its conclusion. In that it was the patriarch himself who offered tithes, it follows that the whole institution including the Levites, is at one stroke relativized by the order of priesthood represented by Melchizedek. ³

Since the priestly stipulation requires that the high priest be one from among the people (5:1), that is, for the high priest to be a true human being, by accepting a tenth from Abraham as ‘Priest of God Most High’ (7:1), Melchizedek established himself as a human being. His meeting with, and receiving a tenth from, Abraham must be viewed as an historical fact in the life of the community of faith. The Melchizedek-Abraham solidarity becomes a binding solidarity for their descendants.

Melchizedek’s solidarity with Abraham, moreover, is a religious or supernatural one. Melchizedek blessed Abraham as ‘priest of God Most High’ (7:1), and Abraham, the recipient of blessing was the man who had the promises (7:6). The giving and receiving acts between these two religious people established a religious or supernatural solidarity. Prior to his meeting with Melchizedek, Abraham entered into solidarity with God Most High, represented by Melchizedek, from whom Abraham received the promises (Gen 12:1-2), ‘I will make you into a great nation . . . and all peoples of the earth will be blessed through you’ (Gen 12:1,3). As priest of God Most High, Melchizedek acted on behalf of the God who made these promises to Abraham. So Hebrews sees Melchizedek being superior to Abraham, ‘[a]nd without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater’ (7:7). By entering into solidarity with Melchizedek, Abraham committed into his care those who were to inherit God’s blessing through him. In accepting what Abraham offered, Melchizedek accepted Abraham and his descendants. This religious solidarity established between Melchizedek and Abraham is to be an on-going solidarity between them and their descendants.

The solidarity between Melchizedek and Abraham is to be an ongoing solidarity, eternal in character. As well as being ‘priest of God Most High’, Melchizedek is without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life,

like the Son of God he remains a priest forever (7:3). ‘In the one case, the tenth is collected by men who die: but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living’ (7:8). Abraham’s action in paying a tenth to Melchizedek established an eternal solidarity with the Levites, and so, therefore, Israel as a community, entered into this self-perpetuating solidarity with Melchizedek.

Since God has appointed Christ as High Priest in the order of Melchizedek (5:6,10), Christ is implicated in the solidarity between Melchizedek and the believing community represented by Abraham. For Christ to function as the new High Priest, however, the law governing the Levitical priesthood had to be changed. ‘For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law’ (7:12). Christ, the new High Priest based on the power of an indestructible life (7:17), was epitomized by Melchizedek, and not along ancestral lines. The eternal solidarity established between Melchizedek and Abraham and his descendants was now to be carried forward by Christ.

Abraham is the recipient of God’s promise (6:15). God promised with an oath to bless him and make him the father of many descendants (6:13,14), or a greater community of faith, identified as ‘we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us’ (6:18). This hope, as a firm and secure anchor for their soul, is rooted in Jesus who has gone into heaven on their behalf; He has become a High Priest forever in the order of Melchizedek (6:19-20). The solidarity between Melchizedek and Abraham becomes the solidarity between Melchizedek’s priesthood and Abraham’s descendants – the community of hope. Like Abraham, this new community is a pilgrim community. It must move forward by faith with God (11:8); be willing to live in temporary shelters (11:9); always journeying toward the city ‘with foundations, whose architect and builder is God’ (11:10). Like their forefathers, this community must hold to its faith and hope when nothing appears to be certain, ‘All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth’ (11:13).

Melchizedek appears and disappears in the Biblical record with no trace of his birth or death. He belongs to this world, yet he is also from outside this world. As part of this world, he is identified as king of Salem, and met Abraham and received the offering Abraham presented to him (7:1-2). But as one without human descendnet, and who ‘is like the Son of God’ (7:3), Melchizedek is a supernatural being, a mythical
being, one who is both human and non-human in character. As a supernatural being, Melchizedek possesses supernatural characteristics, as a king of righteousness and king of peace (7:2), without human genealogy, and without beginning or end of life. A Jewish Pseudepigrapha known as ‘the Book of the Secrets of Enoch (the so called “Slavonic Enoch”)’, 4 which ‘[s]ome scholars have thought that this book was composed by a Christian’, and which has been confirmed by a recent editor. A. Vaillant (Paris, 1952), 5 credits the biblical Melchizedek with supernatural birth. The story says,

When Noah’s brother, Nir, was priest of God, his wife conceived from the Word of God. The angry husband wanted to repudiate her, but at that very moment his wife died. The child left the womb of his mother, complete in his body, and blessing the Lord, with the seal of priesthood upon his breast. Then Nir and his brother recognized that the child was of the Lord. Later, the Archangel Michael took Melchizedek up to Paradise lest he suffer during the deluge; for he will be Melchizedek ‘a priest for ever’. 6

Whilst the Aaronic priests died and had to be replaced, he is declared to be living. This living priest of God Most High, the king of righteousness and peace, is the mediator of righteousness and peace for the community.

The supernatural character of Melchizedek’s priesthood supersedes the Levitical priesthood, and the law that governed it. This is to say, the earthly and the ever-changing priesthood is superseded and replaced by the supernatural and the ever-living superior priesthood. The inadequacy of the Levitical priesthood marks the inadequacy of all human priesthood, and the traditions under which they operate. The superiority of Melchizedek’s priesthood prepared the way for the new High Priest to operate from outside the Levitical tribe (7:13-14). But, like Melchizedek, the new High Priest has to be in solidarity with the community He comes to serve, thus Jesus is presented as belonging to the tribe of Judah. Since Melchizedek is declared to be living, Christ will function as High Priest on the basis of the power of an indestructible life (7:16). The solidarity Melchizedek entered into with the community of faith will now be continued by Jesus.

As Jesus took over the identity of Moses and Joshua as the true Law-giver and deliverer of the community, so now He takes over the identity and function of Aaron

5 Ibid., 229.
6 Ibid., 229.
and Melchizedek as the new High Priest of the community. The installation of Christ as High Priest puts aside the former regulations (7:18); introduces ‘a better hope . . . by which we draw near to God’ (7:19); and guarantees ‘a better covenant’ (7:22). Now Jesus will fulfil these Priestly requirements, because God installed Him into the Priestly office with an oath (7:20-21) rather than by the law of Moses by which the Aaronic priesthood was instituted and under which it operated (7:5,12). God’s promise and oath, by which He entered into solidarity with Abraham and his descendants (6:13-20), provides the community with a firm and secure hope, the anchor of their soul rooted in Jesus, who has entered ‘the inner sanctuary behind the curtain’ (6:19-20) for the community. Christ’s presence in the inner sanctuary consolidates God’s solidarity with the community, and the community’s security in God’s promise and oath with Abraham. Thus God’s solidarity established with Abraham, and confirmed by Melchizedek, is to be continued by Jesus, the new High Priest of the community.

In summing up the Aaronic priesthood, and that of Jesus Christ, Hebrews says, ‘For the law appoints as high priests men who were weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever’ (7:28).

5:2-3 Jesus Christ is both Like and Unlike Melchizedek

Jesus Christ is like Melchizedek in that His Priesthood is eternal. About Melchizedek, Hebrews says, ‘He is like the Son of God he remains a priest forever’ (7:3); the Levitical priests died, Melchizedek is ‘declared to be living’ (7:8). The Priesthood of Jesus is based ‘on the power of an indestructible life’. Of the eternal character of Jesus, Hebrews says, ‘Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever’ (1:8), ‘In the beginning, O Lord, You laid the foundations of the earth and the heavens are the works of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain . . . like a garment they will be changed. But You remain the same, and Your years will never end’ (1:10-12). The indestructible and reliable nature of the character and nature of Jesus is further confirmed at the end of the Epistle with the statement, ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever’ (13:8).

The concept of eternal existence places Jesus as an outsider to the community in the sense that Jesus existed before He became a human being. In contrast to Jesus, all human beings have a beginning and an end to their lives. On the other hand, Jesus, by His incarnation, death, and resurrection became an ‘insider’, a member of the human community. Thus His incarnation and exaltation to the right hand of God qualifies Him
ever more to be both an ‘outsider’ and an ‘insider’, that is, belonging to heaven and earth simultaneously. Jesus is the community’s point of solidarity between God and human beings, between heaven and earth, between the invisible and visible communities.

Since Melchizedek prefigured Christ, and since Christ is implicated in the solidarity between Melchizedek and the believing community of Jews and non-Jews, represented by Abraham, Christ, as the fulfilment of the Melchizedek typology, is our great ancestor. This is all the more so because Jesus is the origin and the culmination of people’s lives, as He is ‘the author and perfector’ of their faith (12:2).

Whilst Jesus and Melchizedek share some common elements, they also differ from each other. Unlike Melchizedek, Jesus was born into the world, had a human genealogy (Mt1:1-17; Lk3:23-30); had a human tribal association (7:14); experienced pain and sorrow, ‘offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears’ (5:7); was tempted in every way but did not commit a single sin (4:15); learned to be submissive and obedient through what He suffered (5:8); died and destroyed the power of Satan and death (2:14); and has become ‘the source of eternal salvation’ (7:9). Jesus is the full embodiment of Old Testament expectations, the fulfilment of the ‘heavenly man’ ideas of the inter-testamental and New Testament era. He is the fullness of God’s promise to the past community of faith (11:3); in solidarity with whom the addressees, and the subsequent communities of faith of every culture and creed, ‘would they be made perfect’ (11:40).

5:2:4 The Superiority of Christ’s Priesthood

The Levitical priesthood offered no perfection (7:11); and was administered by many imperfect men (5:2,3; 7:7, 23, 27), because ‘death prevented them from continuing in office’ (7:23). The system was based on repeated animal sacrifice that could never take away sins (7:27; 10:11); it dealt with external purification only (9:10,13); and allowed only the high priest to enter the Most Holy Place (9:7).

The Priesthood of Christ, on the other hand, is based on ‘the power of an indestructible life’ (7:16); it is instituted after the eternal order of Melchizedek (5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:17); it is a one-man Priesthood, permanent in status (6:20; 7:17, 24); administered by the perfect Son of God (7:28); with one perfect sacrifice (7:27). It offers the people a better hope to draw near to God, or to enter the Most Holy Presence (7:18; 10:19). For, as the perfect High Priest, Christ has entered heaven itself,
appearing there on behalf of the community (9:24), sealing their eternal redemption with His own blood (9:12). Through Christ each member of the community, without discrimination, is enabled to have a face-to-face audience with the Most Holy God, which the Levitical priesthood did not, and could not, offer.7

Christ’s Priesthood, based on an ‘indestructible life’, is free from ancestral ties (7:16). This makes Him the perfect intertribal, interracial, international, and intercosmic High Priest. His incarnation, resurrection and exaltation set aside the former regulations which operated under the Levitical priesthood. As the brother of all humanity (2:11-12), He appeared in human form personally to meet and remove the penalty of sin demanded by the law. The law as the schoolmaster, in Paul’s terminology (Gal 3:24), surrendered its power and its responsibility to Christ. Christ offered Himself as the sacrifice for His people’s sin (7:27; 9:28). George A. F. Knight draws an important distinction between divine and human acts of sacrifices,

‘an effective sacrificial act could only be offered by God Himself. If sinful man should by any chance succeed in constraining God to do His will, then man’s act was no longer sacrifice, but magic. A religious act entails surrender to the will of the Creator God, but magic is the constraint of God by man.’8

On the basis of His self-surrender to God in sacrifice, Jesus has become the people’s eternal Mediator in God’s presence (7:26). He is the universal Priest who paid the price for the whole cosmic order, secured an eternal home for His people, leading all things forward to their determined destination, ‘sustaining all things by His powerful word’ (1:3).

Once the priesthood, and the law governing it, are changed, all other rituals relating to the community’s solidarity with God have to be changed also. Christ, who brought about these changes, is superior to the Levitical priests (8:6), and therefore the covenant He mediates is also superior (8:6-13), because both the ministry and the covenant are ‘founded on better promises’ (8:6). In Him all God’s promises find their ‘yes’ and ‘amen’, as Paul would have put it (2 Cor 1:20). The ministry and the covenant Christ offers are concerned with the renewal of the mind and the heart, as well as with the knowledge of God and the forgiveness of sin (8:10-12), which the Levitical priests and the old covenant could not provide.

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Christ has entered the perfect tabernacle with His own blood – the seal of His ministry and covenant (9:11-12). He is seated ‘at the right hand of the majesty in heaven, serving in the sanctuary – the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man’ (8:1-2). He occupies a superior place, and so His ministry and covenant are superior, dealing with the inner realities – the cleansing of ‘our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God’ (9:14). He accomplished the cleansing of the heavenly things (9:23). The Levitical ministry, and the covenant under which it operated, dealt with external matters, they could not clear the conscience (9:9,10), or cleanse the heavenly things. Since the death of Christ cleanses the conscience, it opens the way for God’s law to be written on the hearts and minds of the people. Christ is God’s new covenant, the new testament, spoken of by Jeremiah (Jer 31:33-34). It is the new covenant because without the cleansing, renewal, and restoration affected by Christ’s death, there can be no solidarity or friendship between God and the people. Renewal enables God’s people to live according to God’s law out of love and gratitude to Him (8:7-13; 10:15-17). Under the new covenant everyone will know God (8:11).

Christ’s ministry and covenant are powerful in their effect: turning promise into fulfilment, offering ‘the promised eternal inheritance’; setting the people ‘free from the sins committed under the first covenant’ (9:24-25); appearing ‘once-for-all at the end of the ages to do away with sin, by the sacrifice of Himself’ (9:26). ‘If the old covenant led to the law, then this new covenant, prophesied by Jeremiah (Jer 31:31) will lead to the law of love, explained in detail in many New Testament Epistles (e.g., Rom 13:8). On the basis of His sacrificial death, out of love for the people, ‘He will appear a second time not to deal with sin, but to offer salvation to those who are waiting for Him’ (9:26-28).

The sacrifices offered under the law are yearly reminders of the people’s sins which could not be removed because ‘it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins’ (10:1-4). The only sacrifice which could effectively remove the sins of the people is the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Jesus died to atone for the sins of the people (2:17). The main purpose of atonement ‘was to make expiation for what a man owed as a debt, a deliberate debt, the owing of which was sin, such as could put him right outside the community of the covenant people, beyond the place where the grace of God was operative through the normal sacrifices.9 Jesus offered a perfect and

9 Ibid., 275.
pleasing sacrifice to God to make the believing community holy (10:5-10), and in so doing ‘He set aside the first in order to establish the second’ (10:10). The shadow and the imperfect must give way to the real and the perfect.

God has accepted Christ’s sacrifice in the place of the yearly animal sacrifices ‘which can never take away sins’ (10:11). Christ is seated at God’s right hand as the perfect High Priest and the perfect sacrifice (10:12). No other high priests and sacrifices are needed to mediate for the sins of the people, ‘because by one sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy’ (10:14). All that people everywhere must do is to accept His sacrifice and acknowledge His Lordship over their lives, or be eternally condemned by Him, ‘since that time He waits for His enemies to be made His footstool’ (10:13).

Christ is the end of all other sacrifices, ‘and where these (sins and lawlessness) have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin’ (10:18). By His perfect sacrifice, Christ has saved innocent animals from being sacrificed for the sins of humanity (10:3-6). Christ, the perfect High Priest, the embodiment of the law, the covenant, and animal sacrifices, has opened the way for the community to have a personal relationship with the holy and righteous God. The Melanesian ancestors, and the traditions they had passed on, could not, and cannot, bring the people into that personal relationship with God.

5:3 THE PRIESTHOOD IN MELANESIA AND THE PRIESTHOOD OF JESUS

5:3:1 The Basis for Becoming a Priest in Melanesia

In Melanesia, a person becomes a priest through heredity, or by appointment. The hereditary priesthood is an automatic transfer of the priestly office and function from the father to his first-born son at the death of the father, or at the wish of the father, which in a way can be regarded as the father appointing his son as his successor. This is the procedure used by the Sentanians of West Papua. Where the priesthood by appointment is practised, the appointment is normally done by the elders on behalf of the community.10 It is important to recognize that the priestly office is a sacred trust,

10 The Huli of the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea, as an example, follow this practice. The appointment was made in cooperation with the individual who chose to become a priest or mediator. On the surface it appears to be an individual matter, but, in reality, the community makes the appointment. Cf. Benjamin S. Gayalu, ‘The Gebeanda: A Sacred Cave Ritual’, in Habel (ed.), Powers, 24.
and therefore needs to be sanctioned by the ancestral spirits. Amongst the Toa[m]baita of Malaita Island in the Solomon Islands, the practising priest would take his first-born son to the man’s house at the time when the boy’s first tooth starts to appear and dedicates the boy to the ancestral spirit. This action is carried out in order to ascertain from the ancestral spirits the destiny of the boy. After the dedication, the father would ask the ancestral spirits to show him his son’s future. The father does this through divination, by chewing betelnut with some leaves and powdered lime. If the betelnut mixture turns out to be dark red, the father immediately takes this as an approval from the ancestral spirits for the boy to succeed him as a new priest. But if the betelnut mixture turns out to be whitish red, the father immediately realizes that the ancestral spirits want the boy to be a war leader, or enter some other vocation. ‘The fact that he is the first-born son does not guarantee him to be the future priest, for it is the ancestral spirits who make the choice of the future priest.’ Some Melanesian communities, like the Orokaiva of Northern Papua, do not have a specialized person as their priest. In this case, individual men act as priest for their own families.¹³ The priests, as ritual experts, collaborate with the ancestral spirits in their practice.¹⁴ This demonstrates the mutual accountability the living and the dead have for each other. The living cannot achieve their goal without the aid of the dead. On the other hand the dead cannot carry out their duties without assistance from the living.

The above discussion shows that in Melanesia the priesthood is based more on heredity or appointment rather than on achievement. When we compare this with the Priesthood of Christ in Hebrews, we see that, in relation to the requirements of priesthood by heredity and appointment, Christ met these requirements fully. On the point of Christ’s Priesthood by heredity, we read ‘You are a Priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek’ (5:6; 6:20; 7:17) – a special, if implied, and mystical line of service. Concerning His Priesthood by appointment, we read, ‘and was designated by God to be a High Priest in the order of Melchizedek’ (5:10); and ‘The Lord has sworn and He will not change His mind: “You are a Priest forever”’ (7:21). The Priesthood by achievement, as we found out, on the other hand, is one which uniquely belongs to

¹¹ Spelling and pronunciation provided by Trompf, Payback, 122.
Christ alone. He fulfilled this requirement by His obedient sacrifice, 'He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves, but he entered the Most Holy Place once-for-all by His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption' (9:12). Only Jesus, as the sinless Son of God, can take away the sin of the people once-and-for-all. No Melanesian priest could or can do this. Whilst the Melanesian priests need to be replaced by others, the Priesthood of Christ, as the eternal Son of God, appointed to the Priesthood in the order of Melchizedek, remains forever.

5:3:2 The Basis for Jesus Becoming a Priest
In the New Testament, Hebrews is the only book which addresses the Priesthood of Jesus in any real detail. This is to be expected, because the central thesis of Hebrews is the high priest or the priestly order. 'Ten times the author calls Jesus archiereus (2:17; 3:1; 4:14,15; 5:5,10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 9:11). Twice directly (7:21; 10:21), and four times (7:3,11,15; 8:4) he applies iereus to Him.' Hebrews is the only book in the New Testament which speaks of Jesus as Priest and High Priest. We are indebted to Hebrews for this information, as it helps us to understand the ministry of Jesus in heaven on behalf of believers. Jesus is regarded as High Priest or Priest in Hebrews on the basis of both heredity and appointment, and, in comparison with the Melanesian priests, His Priesthood is also based on His achievement. With regard to His hereditary Priesthood, Hebrews identifies Him with the Priesthood of Melchizedek, based on 'the power of an indestructible life' (7:16), which ensures permanency of appointment, as against the Aaronic priesthood with no permanent priestly office-bearers, 'since death prevented them from continuing in office' (7:23).

And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, one who has become a priest not on the basis of regulation as to His ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. For it is declared: 'You are a Priest forever in the order of Melchizedek' (7:15-17).

In relation to Jesus' Priestly office by appointment, Hebrews sees Him occupying the position on the basis of God's appointment and oath (5:5-6,10; 7:20-21). The appointment by God does remain in line with the expectations of the Old Testament priesthood, for 'No one takes this honour upon himself; he must be called by God; just as Aaron was' (5:4). The mention of 'oath' links Jesus' Priesthood with the priesthood.

of Melchizedek rather than a Levitical one, however, and the former one was indeed held up as a model of a permanent priesthood in Psalm 110. For the Priesthood of Jesus to stay permanent like that of Melchizedek, He had to achieve it by going through many temptations and suffering, culminating in His death on the cross. ‘Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from what He suffered and, once made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him, and was designated by God to be High Priest in the order of Melchizedek’ (5:8-10). Hebrews sees this Priesthood by achievement as the primary goal of the incarnation of Jesus;

For surely it is not angels He helps, but Abraham’s descendants. For this reason He had to be made like His brothers in every way, in order that He might become a merciful and faithful High Priest in service to God, and that He might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted (2:16-18).

This introductory statement concerning the High-Priestly office and ministry of Jesus harks back to 1:3 where the purpose of the sacrificial death of Jesus is stated, with the phrase ‘[a]fter He has provided purification for sins’. In order for Jesus to become the faithful and merciful High Priest of the people whom He calls His brothers (2:11) He had to sacrifice His life to achieve the position. His perfect sacrificial death established His Priestly office as the Mediator between God and humanity. In the words of Westcott, ‘Thus we are introduced to the idea which underlines the institution of the priesthood, the provision for a fellowship between God and man, for bringing man to God and God to man.’ His achievement fully satisfied, God, therefore, appointed Him to be High Priest with an oath. With the Melanesian priests and high priests, none of them was ever required to sacrifice his or her life to satisfy the ancestral spirits as to his or her qualification for the priestly office. Furthermore, when we look at Melanesia, we find the Melanesian priesthood has been neither a full-time, nor a permanent, office. Melanesian priests acted at the dictate of the community’s needs. Jesus, by comparison, is forever installed as High Priest at God’s right hand (8:1) to intercede for His people (4:16), and is evermore ready to run to their cry in their hour of temptation, pain, or sorrow (2:18). As with the Melanesian priesthood, only the first-born son could legitimately occupy the priestly office. Jesus, too, is fully qualified to be the High Priest because He is the first-born Son of God. All that has been discussed in relation to Jesus

16 Westcott, Hebrews, 56.
17 The concept of Jesus satisfying God with His death is discussed below.
as the first-born Son of God by way of position and function also applies to Him as the High Priest of the people.

5:3:3 The Function of Priests in Melanesia

In Melanesia, the primary function of the priest is to mediate between the community and the spirit world, especially the ancestral spirits, but also the autonomous spirit beings which surround the people. However, because the office of the priest is not a full-time one, the priest can and does act in different ways from time to time, depending on the need of the hour. There are times when the priest can be called on to perform the tasks of a shaman, a magician, or a sage. When a priest acts outside of his hereditary function he must do so at the wish of, or be appointed by, the community in order to avoid life-threatening disputes and confrontations. With Jesus, God appointed Him to meet all His people’s needs singularly without having to consult others. He is the all-sufficient One, and the only true High Priest of His people. He, too, takes on various roles as friend, shepherd, leader, brother, and so on.

Amongst the Sentanians, to pursue one chief Melanesian example, the check mechanism for disputes and confrontations is the kose. The kose determines a man’s position and function in the community. The kose under which a man is born gives him his standing and authority in the community. The kose represents the hereditary blessings sanctioned by the ancestral spirits. The kose enshrines the future inheritance of the new generation. The kose embodies the history and the cosmos to which the individual belongs. In the Sentanian patrilineal community, a man’s kose tells him who he is, the role he is destined to play in the community, where his sago and betelnut palms are, or the location of his gardening, hunting, and fishing grounds, and water. The destiny of his life is the inheritance he received from the kose to which he belongs. A priest, therefore, belongs to a priestly kose. When the priest functions properly according to the kose to which he belongs, his ministry will bless and benefit the community. When the community sees this it will say, ‘he is sitting well’, or ‘he is sitting in his rightful place’, that is to say, he is doing his work well, because the

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18 For an example of this, see Trompf, Religion, 24, 25, where he discusses the role of a holy man.
19 Ibid., 25, for a discussion on various groups of specialized religious leaders and their functions. Trompf’s discussion is also true for the Sentanians. This author’s father who was one of the three great chiefs of Sentani whose hereditary function was that of a mediator, often acted in the role of a shaman from time to time when requested by the community, or when he saw the need to act in that role.
position he occupies is his by right of heredity. The hereditary or ancestral blessings flow through him because the kose has sanctioned him.

Securing positions hereditarily is the basis for the Sentanian leadership. The Sentanian leadership is centred around the kosero and the ondoporo. Mahowe,\textsuperscript{20} the first spirit-human person, sanctioned the position of the ondoporo. He is the first ancestor of the Sentanians who dug his way out of the earth to the surface, and married a woman, Tariaka from Tabati (on the seashore). ‘Mahowe and Tariaka had many children, and these children were normal human beings.’\textsuperscript{21} If their children were normal human beings, by implication, Mahowe and Tariaka were spirit beings,

After the maturity of these children, the two spirits (uarofo) went back inside the earth through the hole Mahowe once dug to get to the surface of the earth. As a remembrance of their father, his children carved his image out of wood, which they called Mahowe, too. In times of need and stress, the names of Mahowe and Tariaka are still mentioned, they are called upon to give help and support. After Mahowe had withdrawn himself, his power was transferred to his eldest son. He became, therefore, the first Ondopolo over his brothers and sisters. The rank was transmitted to the following generations, and became the prerogative of the eldest son.\textsuperscript{22}

The position of the kosero is also based on the tradition of the ondoporo, that is, the position of the kosero, like that of the ondoporo, is an hereditary one. Since the priests can be ondoporo or kosero, their positions and functions are hereditarily determined.

5:3:4 The Priesthood of Jesus with the Sentanian Hereditary System Specifically in View

If Jesus is to be the High Priest of the Sentanian community, He needs to have a human hereditary root, in line with the kose to which he belongs. He must satisfy these two important cultural identifications: His hereditary root and His kose. Unless Jesus meets these two cultural identifications face on, He will remain an outsider, and irrelevant, for the Sentanians of Melanesian origin. If, on the other hand, Jesus meets these two identifications fully, the Sentanians will see Him as a legitimate member of their community, and a legitimate heir of their communal structure, and, therefore, a High Priest they cannot do without. These are important connections because, if Jesus’

\textsuperscript{20} Kamma, Religious Texts, Part A, 54.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 54.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 54. This author’s informants, Joku and Joku, said some Sentanians still continue to call on Mahowe and Tariaka for help when required.
Priesthood is to be relevant to the Sentanians, He must fully meet their cultural expectations, which are the source of their existence and well-being.

There are real difficulties associated with the statements made so far. For one thing, Jesus is not a Sentanian. Secondly, the social structure under which Jesus was born and lived, did not have a kose system as do the Sentanians. Thirdly, every effort must be taken to avoid making Jesus what He is not meant to be. Fourthly, whatever cultural identity we assign to Jesus, it will not fully explain everything about Him. Finally, these difficulties are real, but they should not stop the attempt to make Jesus relevant to a group of people. In fact, this is what the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the whole Bible is all about – contextualizing the eternal within the contingencies of time and space.

I will now discuss the concept of kose as understood by the Sentanians in relation to the Priesthood of Jesus built, on the relationship between Melchizedek and Abraham, or the Levites. In doing this, I will show the way to link the Priesthood of Jesus into the priesthood of Sentani.

In Hebrews, the Priesthood of Jesus is built around the Melchizedek factor far more than the Aaronic priesthood. Jesus is a Priest in the order of Melchizedek (5:6,10; 6:2; 7:17). Yet as a Melchizedekian Priest, Jesus is nonetheless said by the author to fulfil all the requirements of the Aaronic or the Levitical priesthood. Melchizedek is introduced into the priestly argument in relation to Abraham, the ancestor of the Levites (7:10). While Levi was still in the body of Abraham his ancestor, Melchizedek and Abraham met each other (7:1-2 = Gen 14:18-20). Hebrews builds on the Genesis account of their meeting, as it brings the two men into an ongoing relationship with each other. Abraham paid Melchizedek a tenth of the plunder (7:4), the amount the Levites collected from their fellow Israelites as required later by law (7:5). Melchizedek, for his part, blessed ‘patriarch Abraham’ (7:4) ‘who had the promises’ (7:6). Abraham, as the forebear of Levi, represents the changing nature of the Levitical priesthood due to death, whilst Melchizedek represents a never-dying Priesthood (7:8). The ‘dying’ priesthood is blessed by the ‘living’ Priesthood, thereby implying that the ‘living’ Priesthood will take care of the office and functions of the ‘dying’ priesthood, and in so doing, ensure that the office and the functions of the priesthood will continue to exist. If this is the case, then a further implication is that the descendants of the living take care of the descendants of the dead. These would combine the two descendants into one family, sharing the same hereditary roots, belonging to the same family or household, and in
terms of the Sentanian culture, living under the same kose, the kose of the living person. The previous discussion has shown that to belong to a kose is to belong to the ancestor represented by that kose, to live under the responsibility of that ancestor, that is, on the basis of what has been stated above, to live under the care and protection of Melchizedek.

The argument of Hebrews 7 is not only about the relationship between Melchizedek and Abraham. It is also about the relationship between Melchizedek and Jesus. This relationship is stated from the perspective of Jesus rather than Melchizedek, as in the claim ‘like the Son of God he (Melchizedek) remains a Priest forever’ (7:3). Jesus is a Priest in the order of Melchizedek, because the Priesthood of Melchizedek remains forever, so the Priesthood of Jesus also remains forever. As has been pointed out, in Melchizedek we have two priesthoods merged into one—the Levitical priesthood with its changing nature due to the death of the priest, and the Melchizedekian Priesthood that remains forever.

To say that Jesus is a Priest in the order of Melchizedek implies that the Levitical and the Melchizedekian priesthoods are forever united in Him. By its very nature, the Levitical priesthood belongs to the earthly realm and the Priesthood of Melchizedek belongs to the heavenly dimension. Hebrews speaks about this truth in relation to Jesus, ‘[i]f He were on earth, He would not be a Priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts described by the law. They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven’ (8:4-5). However, since Jesus embodies the Levitical, or the Abrahamic, and the Melchizedekian Priesthoods, thereby combining the earthly and heavenly Priesthoods in Himself, it is not out of line with the general argument of Hebrews to see Jesus as the earthly and the heavenly Priest simultaneously. And as Attridge has observed, ‘The ‘heavenly’ is paradoxically, an earthly one, done in a body (1:10), but is heavenly because of its intentionality.’ Considered in this way, Jesus’ Priesthood fits well into the dualistic world-view of the Sentanians discussed in chapter four of this thesis. For the Sentanians, as we have seen, the earthly and the heavenly, the water and the land, the visible and the invisible, belong to each other, and constitute one unified entity. This world-view, as indicated in chapter three of this thesis, in fact is shared in general virtually by all Melanesian communities. So Hughes expresses this unified entity of Christ’s Priesthood in relation to Abraham and Melchizedek,

In Christ, therefore, Abraham and Melchizedek meet again, and they not only meet, but, as figures of the temporal and eternal orders, in Him they are united into one eternal reality. Thus, as both Son of man and Son of God, Christ bridges the gulf which separates man and his guilt on the one side, and God and His righteousness on the other; by His atoning Priestly sacrifice of Himself on the cross He fulfills the requirements for a reconciliation that is complete and everlasting; and in His exaltation, the glory of the Son of God becomes also the glory of the Son of man and of all those sons of men who through faith are forever made one with Him.  

In terms of Sentanian cultural expectations, Jesus belongs to the Abrahamic kose as well as the Melchizedekian one. In chapter 4 we pointed out that in Sentani culture only the ondoporo can have two koses, one sticking out from each end of the roof-beam of his house. As Jesus is the earthly and the heavenly Priest at the same time, He is qualified to have two koses, as a human and a divine representative, and thus, thereby qualifies Him to be the ondoporo of the Sentani people.

Since Melchizedek, being 'like the Son of God', and Jesus, whose Priesthood belongs to the kose of Melchizedek, is God's first-born, Jesus can be proclaimed as the ondoporo kabang or ondoporo humanatere (the first or supreme ondoporo) of the Sentanians. In relation to His Priesthood, He is the Supreme Priest, or ondoporo kabang Priest. Jesus is therefore the apex of the Priestly positions and functions of the Sentanian priests. Thus Jesus becomes the Supreme, or the Chief Priest, or the Kingly Priest, of the Sentanians in every sense of the word, as Hebrews proclaims Him to be. As Jesus has taken over the office and the functions represented by Abraham and Melchizedek, He must also take over the office and function of the Sentanian priests. All the Sentanian priests and their people must look to Jesus and come through Him alone into the very presence of the Holy God. This truth is equally applicable to priests of other Melanesian communities.

What is stated raises one important question: 'How can Jesus possibly be the Chief Priest of the Sentanians when Melchizedek, and especially Abraham the ancestor of the Levitical priests, have no physical connections with the Sentanians? The concept of 'an adoptive past' provides the answer to the question. Abraham is spoken of as one 'who has the promises' (7:6). In Genesis 12:1-3 God's promises to Abraham include a new land and a new nation -- the descendants of Abraham -- and the blessing that Abraham will be to the nations of the world. These promises were confirmed with an oath after

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24 Hughes, Hebrews, 254-255.
Abraham, in obedience to the Lord, sought to offer Isaac as a sacrifice (Gen 22:15-18), but this time it is through Abraham’s offspring or seed that the nations of the world will be blessed. The words of Hebrews 6:13-18 are spoken against the background of the above passages from Genesis. As Anderson has pointed out, Abraham was a Gentile who became a Jew on the basis of faith. ‘Abraham’s faith . . . was originally that of an uncircumcized man, in effect, a gentile, and thus he was the “father” of all gentiles who believe. His subsequent circumcision made him also the father of all believing Jews.’

If this statement is accepted, then Abraham is indeed the father of Jews and Gentiles alike (and in Genesis, in any case, he is already more than the father of Isaac and Ishmael). Better still though, Abraham archetypally stands for all peoples, Jew and Gentile alike, who, as we have shown are related to Melchizedek. This is obviously important for Islam. Since in Abraham and his seed God’s promised blessings would extend to all the nations, by an ‘act of an adoptive past’ the community of God’s people in Sentani, and therefore in Melanesia as a whole, are part of the descendants of Abraham. This means that the Sentanians, or Melanesians, like the recipients of the Epistle to the Hebrews, are heirs of God’s promises;

God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a High Priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek (6:18-20).

Further to the above, within the Melanesian communal structure, the concept of *papamama* fulfilled the function of ‘an adoptive past’. As stated in chapter two of this thesis, the concept of *papamama* covers a broader area than one’s biological parents. It is an extended-family relationship term which includes people outside one’s own immediate family or locality. Older people honoured and respected in the community are considered *papamama*, whether they are from other parts of the same country, or from a different country. Many of the pioneering missionaries are seen by Papua New Guineans as their *papamama*.

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The predetermined purpose of Jesus’ High Priesthood is to make expiation or atonement for the sins of the people. This places the Priesthood and the Priestly ministry of Jesus on a totally different level, and is of a different character than all human priests. Jesus has entered heaven as the High Priest of all peoples, including the Sentanians or the Melanesians, on the basis of the sacrifice He offered of Himself to atone for their sins.

For surely it is not angels that He helps, but Abraham’s descendants [which we read as more than the Israelites only]. For this reason He had to be made like His brothers in every way, in order that He might make atonement for the sins of the people (2:16-17).

Jesus, the High Priest, is at the same time Jesus, the sacrifice. God has accepted His sacrifice as the only one to atone for the sins of the people. Atonement holds God’s mercy and His justice in paradoxical tension. So far as God’s mercy is concerned, atonement is a reconciling process Jesus enacted when He offered Himself as the sin-sacrifice to acquit, forgive, and obliterate human sin which separated human beings from God, and so restore the broken relationship between them. In atonement, God acted in grace to remove His own wrath directed toward human disobedience and sin by appointing His Son as the High Priest and sacrifice. So far as God’s justice is concerned, the Son’s atoning death neither obliterates the Father’s judgment, nor induces Him to respond in love toward sinful humanity if they fail to accept God’s offer of mercy through His Son’s death by faith, for God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (2 Cor 5:21). Sinners refusing to respond to Christ’s atoning death through faith, or those who fall away, incur God’s judgment on themselves. Their disbelief makes them enemies of the Son who suffered and died for them. One day they will be placed under His feet to be trampled on (1:13; 10:13). The Epistle speaks of: eternal judgment (6:2); ‘a raging fire that will consume the enemies of God’ (10:27); ‘a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God’ (10:31), a God who is ‘a consuming fire’ (12:29).

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27 Hughes, Hebrews, 121.
The efficacy of Christ’s atoning death is a once-for-all sacrifice ‘to take away the sins of many people’ (9:28), for Jesus ‘had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins’ (10:12). The sacrifice the Son offered is so complete, perfect, and pleasing to God that He sat down at the right hand of God as: the obedient Son (1:3); the faithful High Priest (8:2); the perfect sacrifice (10:12); ‘the author and perfector of our faith’ (12:2). Ebert stresses the importance of these exaltation passages in relation to the Son’s atoning sacrifice, ‘What the writer of Hebrews will expound in his or her Epistle, as no one ever had, is the exaltation of the Son in light of His Priestly sacrifice. When He had made cleansing for sins as the Priest of the new order (Ps 110:4), Christ sat down as the exalted Messianic King (Ps 110:1).’ 29 On the same note, and with reference to the Day of Atonement, Dunnill writes, ‘Whilst Hebrews has material relating to the Passover, as to almost every aspect of the cultic system, its central argument straightforwardly expounds the death and exaltation of Jesus as fulfilment of the Day of Atonement ritual, and in particular...the entry of the high priest into the Holy of Holies’. 30 Contrary to Ebert, Dunnill, and others, Lindars argues, ‘the climax of the argument is not to be found in the central chapters on the sacrifice of Christ (7:1-10:18), as is assumed by so many readers, and is implied by Vanhoye’s chiastic analysis, but in the great section of faith which follows (10:19-12:29).’ 31 In support of his position, Lindars points out that the author is not propounding a new doctrine or correcting doctrinal heresy, ‘but his aim is to win back his audience to the foundations of the apostolic faith and to renew their confidence in the form of Christian practice which is already established in their church.’ 32 It needs to be said in reply to Lindars, that the ‘foundation of the apostolic faith’ is in fact the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:36; 4:10; Col 1:20; 2:15; Phil 2:6-11). It would be right to say that without the central passage of Hebrews (7:1-10:19), the practical part of the Epistle would make no sense. Lindars himself concurs with this view when he discusses the unchanging message of the Epistle – ‘Jesus the Christ’ – which he claims to be a primitive confession of faith. 33 He goes on to state:

Moreover it is this confession, using *ho huios*, which is the core of the opening statement of Christology in chapter 1. This statement can now be seen to be a carefully-composed presentation of what the author regards as the faith of the

32 Ibid., 384.
33 Ibid., 387.
founders, which he can take for granted as doctrine held also by all his readers. It is the foundation of the whole argument of the Epistle, for the presentation of the sacrificial death of Jesus presupposes it, and is not valid without it, because only on this basis can His death be identified as an eschatological event. 14

5:4:1 High Priest, Atonement and Sacrifice

Atonement cannot be accomplished without the high priest and the sacrifice. When Aaron the high priest entered the Holy of Holies he had to take with him the blood of the sacrifice and offer it to God on the altar. Jesus took His place in the heavenly Holy of Holies with the blood of the sacrifice — His own blood. Mitchell says, ‘Atonement requires the ministry of the high priest: Jesus is the High Priest. Atonement requires the death of the sacrificial victim to release the blood: Jesus died. Atonement requires the entry of the high priest through the veil into the Holy of Holies: Jesus passed through the veil of His flesh into the presence of God in heaven.’ 15

Jesus the High Priest became the atoning sacrificial victim in order to establish a community, a family of God (2:11). This was God’s great purpose for the atoning sacrificial death of His Son. Jesus died in the place of sinners. He died to obtain forgiveness for all humanity. His death is a substitutionary death. ‘Genuine forgiveness’, in the words of Buswell, ‘always involved substitutionary death.’ 16 By the grace of God Jesus died a substitutionary death for the entire human race (2:9), and opened the door into heaven for the family of God. In order for humanity to belong to His family, God carried out two very significant acts. Firstly, He offered Jesus as sacrifice, making ‘the Pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering’ (2:10). Secondly, He accepts all who respond to that offer of salvation by faith by granting them a family likeness — adoption into the likeness of Jesus, who thus is not ‘ashamed to call them brothers’ (2:11).

The biblical substitutionary role is comparable to the practice of adoption in Melanesia. Families without a son or a daughter of their own adopt children of their relatives as substitutes for what they do not have. The act of substitutionary adoption brings the adopter and the adoptee into a lifelong personal relationship with and

34 Ibid., 387.
35 Alan C. Mitchell, ‘The use of propein and rhetorical propriety in Hebrews 2:10’, The Catholic Biblical Quarterly 54.4 (1994): 690. For differences of opinions as to when Jesus achieved atonement or redemption for humanity, see discussions by Bruce, Hebrews, 200-201, and his n. 82, page 201. For a thorough discussion on this, see Hughes, Hebrews, 329-371.
responsibility to each other. Melanesians respond readily to something which is of real significance for themselves. Adoption is important because of the personal identity it carries with it. This personal identity for Melanesians not only binds the living with the living, it also binds the living with the living-dead. It is this ongoing identity that allows Melanesians to relate to their ancestors through such concepts as history, time, and space. Children are named after their ancestors for these three reasons. The name of the ancestor is their unwritten history. It takes them back in time, reminding them of the root of their existence and their right to their ancestral heritage: the land, the water, the gardening and the hunting ground, the betelnut and the sago palms, and the kose, under which the kosero or the ondoporo lives and acts with authority.

Jesus, through His coming and death on the cross, fully answers Melanesian identity with their ancestors in terms of history, time, and space. Jesus is the fulfilment of all history, ‘In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son’ (1:1-2). The history of the ancestors, as indicated earlier, extends as far back as the primordial time to Adam and Eve, that is to say, the entirety of human history. Jesus provides full meaning to the Melanesian concept of taim bipo or taim bilong tumbuna. In this way, Jesus becomes the focus of Melanesian history. This sense of history takes us into the Melanesian concept of time. Time for Melanesians begins and ends with the ancestors. Melanesian ancestors come under the time frame established in the Bible, as shown above. Biblically viewed, time for the Melanesians begins and ends with Jesus. Thus, when Hebrews says, ‘but in these last days He (God) has spoken to us in His Son’, it means the coming of Jesus marks the end of time. This is to say, the coming of Jesus marks the end of the time of the ancestors. For the Melanesians, this means instead of looking to their ancestors for the meaning of history and time, they must now look to Jesus. Instead of keeping their ancestors perpetually before them, they must now keep their eyes fixed on Jesus. Instead of looking to their ancestors for protection, provision, and prosperity, they must now look to Jesus alone. Instead of worshipping and honouring their ancestors, all Melanesians must now worship and honour Jesus exclusively. These statements do not, however, remove the importance of honour and respect Melanesians must have for their ancestors. Melanesians can continue to honour them for who they were and what they achieved, and more especially to remember them

as members of their respective families. But in so far as saving faith and worship are concerned, Melanesians are to look to Jesus and worship Him alone. This is to be so because the phrase 'in these last days' represent the time between incarnation and consummation, both of which carry personal significance for Melanesians. Incarnation speaks of identification and substitution resulting in full adoption by faith, consummation speaks of renewal and glorification:

So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him (9:28). For in just a very little while, 'He who is coming will come and will not delay. But My righteous one will live by faith. And if He shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him' (10:37). These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect (11:39-40).

Nothing can have more personal significance than what the writer of Hebrews has expressed in the verses quoted above. In terms of space, Melanesians view it as something both their ancestors have brought about or bequeathed to them and they continue to share it with the living members of the community. This fundamental belief of Melanesians finds its fulfilment in Jesus, 'whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe' (1:2). Jesus owns and shares all that He possesses and has created with the community of believers, Melanesians included. This also adds strength to that personal significance of Jesus for every Melanesian.

The substitutionary atoning sacrifice of Jesus, furthermore, holds the key to Melanesian self-identity as anchored in their ancestral practices. Melanesians carried out sacrifices to establish good relationships with their ancestors [and deities]. The animals were killed at the appointed places where the men of the community enter into communion with their ancestors. In addition, the sacrifices united men and women, and brought them into solidarity with, or reminded them that they were of one blood with, their ancestors.\(^{38}\) The concept of one-bloodness or *wanblut* in Pidgin, provides the Melanesians with a strong sense of identification with each other.

Once a soccer match took place between village S and village D among the Sentanians. Village D players, realizing they were losing the match, turned the game into a fight. In the heat of the fight, a man from village D hit a man from village S on the forehead with a stone. Unfortunately, the man from village S lost some blood as the

\(^{38}\) Idusulia, 'Biblical Sacrifice', 279-281.
result of it. When the fight was over, it was learned that the two men were blood-related through their ancestors. This meant that their normal peaceful one-bloodness existence had been disturbed by the fight. The fight had changed the relationship between the two men and their respective clans. More than this, it disturbed the relationship between the living and the dead. With their ancestors disturbed by it, the physical action had become a religious concern. This called for the restoration of the lost blood. Some months later this was settled by the relatives of the man in village D with a great boar caught in a trap in the jungle. The lost blood of the man in village S was replaced by the blood of the boar shed in death. The door was opened for the two clans in villages S and D to enter into a normal relationship with each other. The relationship between their respective ancestors was restored, as well as the relationship between the ancestors and the living members of their clans. This one story illustrates the significance of the never-ending compensatory practices throughout Melanesia.

The Epistle to the Hebrews compares the blood of Jesus with that of Abel, ‘to Jesus the Mediator of a new covenant and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel’ (12:24). The Epistle identifies the blood of Jesus with the blood of Abel, and in so doing, restores the relationship between Abel, the innocent, and his brother Cain, the transgressor. Here human ancestral associations go back even further than Abraham, but again the significance is another symbol, and stands for happenings imported as a primary purpose of Christ’s sacrifice. Through Jesus the Mediator, Abel and Cain find each other and are restored to each other. But the context of the passage takes the restoration between Cain and Abel into the spiritual realm, and presents it as the restoration between Cain and God, ‘the judge of all men’ (12:23); again through Jesus as the one great Mediator. The broken relationship between Cain and Abel is the broken relationship between and among all humanity. Jesus the Mediator and High Priest shed His blood to restore both humanity with humanity, and humanity with divinity. The incarnation brought Jesus into one bloodness with humanity (2:1-18). Earthly restoration in Christ symbolizes eternal restoration in the heavenly world with God, through faith in Jesus and His finished work on the cross.

5:4:2 The Priesthood of Jesus is For All Humanity

Moreover, the Epistle to the Hebrews demonstrates Jesus’ identity with all His people as their High Priest in several remarkable ways also. Firstly, Jesus is presented as one who fully understands and sympathizes with the people’s failures and weaknesses
(2:18). Secondly, Jesus is shown as the One who is personally responsible for the well-being of His community, by uniting them into a household over which He is Lord (3:6). Thirdly, Jesus is represented as the advocate through whom they can draw near to God (4:14-16). Fourthly, Jesus is depicted as a truly universal High Priest who functions ‘on the basis of the power of an indestructible life’ (7:16).

To make the universal priesthood effective, God changed the law governing the priesthood (7:12). This change of priesthood places Jesus outside the confines of the Jewish nationalistic priesthood represented by the Levitical priesthood, and outside the tribal priest of the Judaic tribe into which Jesus was born (7:14). Jesus’ Priesthood is based on ‘the power of an indestructible life’, ‘He entered into at the moment of resurrection when He triumphed over death’, as Brooks puts it.39 Whilst we are accustomed to talking about the Priesthood of Jesus, Johnson correctly draws attention to Christ as a singular Priest, saying that ‘in the author’s view there can only have been one true Priest. Such a view entails that we cannot, without considerable elaboration, begin to think of Christ as our “true representative” before God: we have no modern analogy to this concept of His Priesthood.’40 When the comments by Brooks and Johnson are combined, Jesus the Priest stands alone without a superior or subordinate priest to Him. He is the true universal Priest. He is the true Priest of every nation, tribe, clan, and family. The truth expressed here stands as a challenge to every culture.

Viewed in the light of His atoning sacrificial death and His resurrection victory, the writer of Hebrews sees Jesus the Priest as ‘a new and living way’. This way is new because it did not exist until Jesus died and rose from death. This way is ‘living’ because He lives for evermore to intercedes for us. This way is ‘living’ because those who by faith come to Him receive fullness of life through Him.

If all that has been said about the Priesthood of Jesus is correct, it leaves no room for any other beings, human or angelic, to take the place of Jesus as the Mediator or the High Priest between God and humanity. This would not allow for the kind of classification that may imply other Mediatorship besides Jesus, as Narokobi has stated: ‘Melanesians, like Christians, have orders or classes of spirit entities. Thus, in Christianity there is first God, then the blessed Trinity; then there are the angels; then the Blessed Virgin and the Saints.’41 The first six chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews

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categorically oppose any claim that places angels and the great Biblical saints on equal footing with Jesus.

Furthermore, the Priesthood of Jesus Christ makes Christianity a living religion in that the resurrected Jesus is the living High Priest enthroned in heaven, evermore interceding for His people. Christ’s living Priesthood, based on the power of ‘an indestructible life’, not only transferred the Aaronic priesthood to that of the Melchizedekian order,\(^2\) it has also brought an end to the law that governed the Aaronic priesthood based on rituals, sacrifices, laws, and regulations (7:12); because ‘[t]hey are only matters of food and drink and various ceremonial washings – external regulations applying until the time of the new order’ (9:10). The writer of Hebrews sees the Aaronic priesthood as being superseded and fulfilled in the Melchizedekian-like High-Priesthood of Christ Jesus. The incarnation and the Priestly ministry of Jesus belong to ‘the time of the new order’, an eschatological age, ‘but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son’ (1:2). The time of the new order inaugurated the ‘new covenant’, and made obsolete the time of the former order – the ‘old covenant’, ‘and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear’ (8:13). Since God put in place the time of the ‘old order’ – the time of traditions and regulations, biblically – and declares His own laws and regulations ‘obsolete’ in the light of Jesus, it follows that all the former orders of all human communities all around the world have become unnecessary also. For Melanesians, the powerful implication is they can no longer hold on to their old traditions without carefully relating and understanding these traditions with reference to the High-Priestly ministry of Jesus. What is said here becomes all the stronger when we consider the Priesthood of Jesus in the light of His relationship to God as the first-born Son.


The writer of Hebrews sees the Aaronic priesthood being superseded and fulfilled in the Melchizedek-like High-Priesthood of Christ Jesus.
5:5 JESUS THE HIGH PRIEST IS THE FIRST-BORN SON OF GOD

This section will cover three important areas related to the Priestly ministry of Jesus as God’s first-born Son:

- Jesus as the Ancestor-Priest
- Jesus as the First-born High Priest
- Jesus as the Foundation and Head of the Community

5:5:1 Jesus as the Ancestor-Priest

Hebrews presents Jesus as the Son of God within the community of ancestors. Being the Creator and Possessor of all things, His line of ancestorhood reaches beyond Abraham – the father of faith, to Adam – the father of humanity. Although Adam is not mentioned in Hebrews, he is one among those who received God’s revelation, like Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, etc. ‘God spoke to Adam “in the cool of the day” (Gen 3:8); to Abraham in visions and visits – in fact, Abraham was called God’s friend (James 2:23); to Jacob in a dream; to Moses “face-to-face” (Exod 33:11) as a man speaks with a friend.’ Being the Son of God, descended from heaven (1:3), Jesus’ origin reaches beyond this world into the world of the spirits of the ancestral figures. He is therefore of this world, and out of this world. He is a citizen of this world and of heaven simultaneously. As has been pointed out, His Priesthood belongs to this world and to the heavenly world also.

As the Son of God, who descended from heaven, Jesus towers far above Adam and Abraham. In this way, Jesus takes over the role or the responsibility assigned to Adam and Abraham. His death, implied in the words ‘[a]fter He had provided purification for sins’ (1:3),\(^4\) is stated in priestly metaphor. He who is the Priest is also the sacrifice. His sacrificial death marks the death of Adam, which is death unto sin; and the resurrection of Jesus implied in ‘He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven’ (1:3) marks the beginning of a new humanity, the humanity of faith and obedience represented by Abraham. As Adam’s representative, Jesus tasted death for all humanity, as Abraham’s representative, Jesus obtained faith for all humanity as ‘the


Concerning the relationship between Adam and Christ, Dahl writes: ‘In certain Jewish-Christian circles, even Adam and Christ are identified; this view is perhaps influenced by gnostic ideas, which, however, in general, distinguish between the primordial (heavenly) Man – some time identified with the Saviour – and the first-created man’, N. A. Dahl, ‘Christ, Creation and the Church’, in Davies and Daube (eds.), *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 427.
Author and Perfector of our faith' (12:2). As Adam's representative, Jesus brought life out of death by defeating Satan, death, and sin (2:14-15).

Jesus Christ is the man whom God intended Adam to be. Christ did all that Adam failed to do. Christ was obedient where Adam was disobedient. Christ exercised Lordship where Adam refused to fill the role of king. Christ's actions mean life for men, whereas Adam's action led to death. Christ exhibits fully and completely the image of, and the glory of, God. In this, too, Adam was a failure.45

In relation to Abraham, Jesus is the promised seed (11:19). The early and modern interpreters have seen in that verse, figuratively speaking, the figure of Christ whom God raised from the dead as that seed which was prefigured in Isaac.46 So when we see Jesus being the promised seed, as the first-born Son of God, we see Him both as the ancestor and the High Priest of Adam and Abraham. Jesus, therefore, is the ancestor and the High Priest of all ancestors. There are good reasons why we can regard Jesus as our ancestor and the High Priest par-excellence, and we will outline them one after the other.

Firstly, His humanity made Him a member of the human community, brother of the brothers (2:11), who shared their humanity (2:14), having deep concern for their well-being (2:16), belonging to a particular human tribe (7:14), and possessing a truly human body (10:5). Just as human ancestry ties the people of any culture to the root of their heritage, so Jesus' Jewish ancestry ties Him to Jewish heritage. 'Your ancestry was your identity and your status. Jesus, then, was not just a man. He was a particular person born within a living culture. His background, ancestry, and roots were shaped and influenced, as all His contemporaries were, by the history and fortunes of His people'.47 But in dealing with the Jesus genealogy in Matthew, Wright draws attention to four foreign women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba (Mt 1:3-6), about whom he writes:

It may be that one reason for Matthew including them is that there were question marks and irregularities in their marriages, which may be Matthew's way of showing that there was scriptural precedent even for the irregularity of Jesus' birth from an unmarried mother. But probably more significant is the other thing

45 John Gerald Strelan, The Return-To-Origins Motif in Pauline Theology and Its Significance for a Theological Interpretation of Messianic and Millenarian Movements in Melanesia', A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Department of Exegetical Theology in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Theology, (1973), 122-123.
46 Hughes, Hebrews, 484-486. For further modern interpretations, consult the text in various commentaries on Hebrews.
47 Christopher J. H. Wright, Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament (Great Britain: Marshall Pickering, 1992), 3.
they all have in common. They were all, from a Jewish point of view, foreigners. Tamar and Rahab were Canaanites (Gen 38; Josh 2); Ruth was a Moabitess (Ruth 1); Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah, a Hittite, so probably a Hittite herself (2 Sam 1). The implication of Jesus being the heir of Abraham, and his universal promise, is underlined. Jesus the Jew, and the Jewish Messiah, had Gentile blood.\(^{48}\)

Secondly, Jesus is qualified to be the ancestor of human beings because He alone can bring the people to glory. As the Pioneer, Jesus is the Leader and Trail-blazer of the community (2:10).

In Greek writings, *Ton Archegon* was used of a hero who founded a city, gave it its name, and became its guardian. It also denoted one who was head of a family, or founder of a philosophic school. The term also had a distinct military connotation, referring to a commander of an army who went ahead of his men and blazed the trail for them. The idea here is of a leader who opens up a new way.\(^{49}\)

As High Priest Jesus is His people’s trail-blazer who has opened up a new and living way by His own blood, so that His people can confidently draw near to God in worship (Heb 10:19-21).

Thirdly, ancestors are those who established the community on the basis of their power and wisdom. Jesus is the embodiment of power and wisdom which Melanesians sought to give them wholeness of life. ‘But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because He suffered death, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone’ (2:9).

Fourthly, an ancestor is one who achieved something great for the community. Jesus achieved for the community what no other human ancestor has been able to achieve. Jesus died as a human being to purify the community from all its sins (1:3). The shedding of His blood as a sacrificial act in the place of the blood of animals purified human conscience from acts that lead to death (9:15) in order to serve the living God. He died once-and-for-all to do away with the sin that separated human beings from God. But now He has appeared once-for-all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself (9:26). On the basis of Christ’s accomplished and accepted sacrifice, the people have full and free access into the very presence of God through their Ancestor-High Priest, who is their new and living way (10:19-20).


Hebrews assumed the presence and the effect of sin on the life of the people of God without defining it. Sin is not defined in the Epistle, either in relation to the law or to God, but is everywhere assumed that it constitutes a barrier to fellowship with God.\textsuperscript{50} According to Denney, Hebrews defines sin in relation to its grand theme – the death of Jesus.\textsuperscript{51} Hebrews sees sin as a serious matter. Sin besets or clings closely to Christians in their race (12:10); it is deceitful (3:13); brings temporary enjoyment (11:25); Christians have to wage war against it (12:4). These expressions of sin tell us that sin has permeated every part of human life and culture. Human culture everywhere is tainted with sin, and some of it is demonic.\textsuperscript{52} In Melanesian society, the demonic power of sin is exhibited in the practices of sorcery, magic, witchcraft, the worship of, and communication with, the dead. The ancestors, as elders and leaders of the community, carried out their ritualistic practices in times of extremity, to deal with the eventuality of sin. Jesus Christ, who is the Ancestor-High Priest, as God’s answer to the human predicament, is fully qualified to remove the taint of sin, and its consequence on human culture, on the basis of His sinless nature and perfect sacrifice of Himself as a human substitute.

Fifthly, Jesus’ substitutionary death qualified Him to be the ancestor of the community and its High Priest. Melanesians revere and enlist the aid of the ancestors on the basis of their exemplary life, as those who have fulfilled the Lo of their ancestors. Jesus is the perfector of the Christian faith (Heb12:2).\textsuperscript{53} The sinless perfection of His character qualified Jesus to be the source of salvation and the High Priest of the community, in the order of Melchizedek (5:9-10).\textsuperscript{54} As the perfector and Mediator of the community, Jesus not only fulfilled the cultic role of the community ancestors, but the highest Lo, representing the will of God which no human ancestor was able to fulfil, ‘I have come to do Your will, O God (10:7, 9). Assuming that the thought of Hebrews


\textsuperscript{52} John Stott, \textit{The Lausanne Covenant: An Exposition and Commentary} (Minneapolis, Minnesota: World Wide Publications, 1975), 43.


\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Ibid.}, 161-163 for a discussion on the perfectibility of man and the perfectibility of Jesus.
may have been influenced by an Alexandrian-Philonic school of interpretation, or the Jewish wisdom literature, or by the life of the Qumran covenantal community, or in the heavenly angelic beings, we find in Hebrews that, when compared with Jesus, the best of human and angelic beings fail to match the excellence of the High Priest who is Son of God.

The mention of sin reminds us of the primordial sin due to the disobedience of the primordial humanity (Gen 3), with the promise to redeem what sin had destroyed. In the midst of pain, suffering, and alienation from the presence of God and the garden of Eden, a note of victory is struck. ‘And I will put enmity between you and woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel’ (Gen 3:15). Hebrews portrays the fulfilment of this prophesy when Jesus, as the new head of humanity, crushed Satan and conquered sin and death – the sting of death (to use Paul’s expression, 1 Cor 15:55), on behalf of His people, the descendants of Abraham (2:14-16) – and becomes God’s provision for His people in their hour of temptation (2:17-18).

5:5:2 Jesus as the First-born High Priest

In Jewish society, as in Melanesian communities, the first-born inherits the family heritage. The right of inheritance in Melanesia is by virtue of heredity or achievement. The sociological structures of Melanesian communities are either patrilineal or matrilineal. In both cases the right of inheritance by heredity is automatic. In patrilineal communities, the first-born son inherits his father’s position and possessions automatically when the father dies, or at the father’s wish. The right of inheritance by achievement depends on the son’s ability as a good gardener, hunter, orator, or warrior. Whatever the son achieved by his ability becomes his possession, as can be seen from the following story. The Kwalimurubu clan of the Kemabolo village in the Rigo sub-


district of the Central Province of Papua New Guinea inherited its ancestral name, 'Rigonuma' from chief Manugoro of Sogerinomu (present-day Sogeri) who was killed by warrior Sakabarana, the great ancestor of Kwalimurubu clan. The story says many warriors from the Motuan villages and others attempted to kill chief Manugoro who lived on the ridges of the Sogeri mountains, some 30 kilometres north of Port Moresby, and who caused a lot of problems for them, but they did not succeed. Sakabarana at last proved victorious over chief Manugoro. Before Sakabarana took his head, chief Manugoro told him to name his village and his ancestorship after his household, 'Rigonuma'. Ever since that day, the leadership of the Kwalimurubu clan of Kemabolo village (see above) took on the name 'Rigonuma' as the name of their ancestorship.59

By inheriting the name the 'Rigonuma' Sakabarana, the ancestor warrior of the Kwalimurubu clan made chief Manugoro subservient to him. In surrendering his household name, chief Manugoro surrendered all his rights and possessions to chief Sakabarana. Thus, all that the first-born inherits by heredity and by achievement are his in solidarity with the rest of the family. Melanesian ancestral Lo ensures that the first-born does not selfishly retain everything to himself and neglect his brothers and sisters who are dependent on him. What he inherits must be held in trust in conjunction with the rest of the family, because the rest of his family are his inheritance also. Accordingly, his brothers and sisters, but especially his brothers, with their families, are dependent on him as their first-born to share the family inheritance with them. In patrilineal communities women marry into their husbands' families and become possessors of the husband's family heritage. In this way, the women lose their rights to their father's inheritance once they are married. Admittedly, the rule is not always so hard and fast. The woman's sons, through her umbilical cord connection with her brother, her son's maternal uncle, they (her sons) can have a share of their maternal heritage as well.

In matrilineal communities the Lo of the first-born remains the same as for the patrilineal communities. However, in the matrilineal situation, the first-born girl inherits the family heritage. It is her responsibility to share the family heritage with her sisters. Also in matrilineal communities, the man marries into the woman's clan. In this case, the man loses his right to his mother's inheritance. However, his daughters,

59 Information provided by Duli Asi, fifth-generation great, great son of Saka, at the Christian Leaders' Training College of Papua New Guinea, Banz, WHP of Papua New Guinea in May 1999.
through his umbilical cord connection with his sister, they (his daughters) can have an inheritance in their paternal aunt’s family.

Whilst the right to the family inheritance belongs to the first-born daughter, when she gets married her husband becomes the head of their family. Traditionally, the maternal uncle was responsible for disciplining his sister’s children. With modern influence, and the Christian understanding of the place of the father and husband in the family, the father is now responsible for the care and discipline of the children, together with his wife. In Christian families, the husband and wife take turns in leading family devotions. The right of ownership is becoming more and more of a joint venture. The widower in a matrilineal society, and the widow in a patrilineal society, can inherit property in the wife’s or husband’s place, respectively, when their partners die. The property they own is kept in custody on behalf of their children.60

The point of the above discussion is to show the relevance, the responsibility, and the place of the first-born in Melanesian communities, be they patrilineal or matrilineal communities. It needs to be said that on the finer points there are exceptions from place to place.

In Hebrews, as indicated above, Jesus is presented as God’s first-born. If Jesus is to be relevant to Melanesians He must fit into the Melanesian ancestral Lo pertaining to first-born Melanesian sons and daughters, and other related issues, just as He came under Jewish laws and regulations in Palestine. This in fact is what Hebrews says about Jesus. God has finally spoken to the world through Jesus His (first-born) Son, whom He (God) appointed heir of all things, through whom He (God) made the universe (1:2). That God is the creator of all things can be seen from what is said in 2:10. In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the Pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering. Whilst 1:2 and 2:10 agree with the fact that God is the creator of all things, in 1:11-13 God credits the acts of creation and destruction of the heavens and the earth to the Son. ‘In the beginning, O Lord, You laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the works of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed.’

Melanesians would have no difficulty in understanding and agreeing with the fact that, as God’s first-born, Jesus is the rightful owner of all that belongs to God as the

60 Information provided by Francis Hanoi and Phoebe Mota, at CLTC in June 2004.
cosmic ancestor. Jesus has the right to inherit what legally belongs to the Father. All that the Father created is His by right of heredity. Melanesians, on the other hand, may have difficulty in trying to reconcile with the fact of the Father and the Son both being creators. Melanesians can overcome this difficulty by remembering that in their communities whatever the father made, such as planting a garden, the son participated in planting the garden by being part of his father, that is, by the son being in the body of his father. In this way, the father and the son together are planters of the garden. This is how the writer of Hebrews explains the relationship between Abraham and the Levitical priests. ‘One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor’ (Abraham) (7:8-10).

We have also said that in Melanesia, the first-born not only inherits the father’s heritage, but also the father’s position. This can happen when the father dies, or at the father’s wish, that is, the father takes the initiative to install the son in his place while he is still alive. In this case, the son and the father are seen as co-equals or co-rulers. In Jesus’ case, He fits into the second category most perfectly. Hebrews presents the position and the Lordship of Jesus at the wish of the Father, but about the Son He (the Father) says, ‘Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever, and righteousness will be the sceptre of Your kingdom’ (1:8). Here we see how God the Father takes the initiative to install Jesus His Son as co-equal or co-ruler with Him. The idea of co-rulership is implied in 1:8 but becomes more explicit in 1:9 in the statement, ‘therefore God, Your God, has set You above Your companions by anointing You with the oil of joy.’ The context of our two texts suggests that the statements contained in them have a retrospective view of the Son’s accomplished work for the purification of human sins. In other words, we are to understand these statements in the context of the Son’s resurrection. This is the way Brooks understands the relationship between the Son and the angels, which occurs in the context of the discussion. According to Brooks, Hebrews quotes Ps 2:7 in 1:5 to demonstrate Jesus’ superiority over the angels. Such superiority was not present during the earthly ministry when Jesus was for a little while made lower than the angels (2:9). Yet now He is crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death. Thus Jesus was raised higher than the angels after He learned obedience through what He suffered, that is, precisely at the resurrection.\[61\]
What the Son achieved on the cross, and in His resurrection from the grave, demonstrates His acts of obedience and victory, which no other being in heaven or on earth had been able to accomplish.

At this point, two important questions arise out of the discussion so far: ‘Did Jesus cease to be God when He became man, and therefore the Father had to re-install Him as God?’ The second question is, ‘Did Jesus cease to be a human being when He ascended into heaven?’ The concise statement given at the end of the Epistle answers the questions, ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever’ (13:8). This statement implies that the twin-natures of Jesus continue to remain with Him. Yesterday He was God, today He is still God. Yesterday He was a human being, and today He is still a human being. He therefore remains the same forever, the God-Man. The point about the Father installing the Son as God is done in acknowledgment, in gratitude and utter thankfulness for the once-for-all unique act the Son undertook to accomplish. The cross and the grave, death and resurrection are inseparable, they remain one unique event. Thus, the point which must be stated is the Son, who has been God from the beginning and continued to be God whilst on earth, is now placed on the throne by the Father as God. In so doing, the Father wants all in heaven and on earth to worship Him as their God. The Son is God by virtue of His eternal existence, heredity, and achievement. He came into the world as God. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being (1:3). And now, after His resurrection, we read, ‘[b]ut about the Son, He (God) says, “Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever, and righteousness will be Your sceptre forever and ever” ’ (1:8). The two statements, one before, and one after the resurrection, tell us that the Son has been proclaimed God twice so that all creatures in heaven, on earth, under the earth, and in the air may know that there is none equal to Jesus, the God of the whole universe, who alone must be worshipped, praised and honoured forever and ever.

5:4:3 Jesus as the Foundation and Head of the Community
In the Sentanian community, a man was accorded the highest honour when he captured the head of an enemy warrior. Such an act of bravery called for immediate marriage if he was a bachelor. The whole community would sing his praise and call his bride blessed because her groom was the pride and the envy of all other young women in the community. The joy and the praise of the community were beyond expression if the warrior-groom happened to be the first-born son of the ondoporo. The entire
community from east to west would celebrate the victory for days on end, because not only had the warrior-groom achieved something great for the entire community, but also because his bravery had won the approval and the blessing of his ancestral spirits. For this reason, the living and dead joined in celebration, because the first-born of the ondoporo was considered as yopa-yangpa⁶² (son of the village, son of the roof). The yopa-yangpa therefore was the base and the height of the community. This meant the first-born son of the ondoporo is the foundation and the head of the community.

The ondoporo occupies the fullest power and authority in the community, and therefore deserves the praise due to his position. When he appears, everyone must sit down in honour of him, when he speaks everyone must hear and obey. This is because the yopa-yangpa is also known as the waribuna-naribunapa⁶³ (son from or of the life-giving water-spirit). Thus the waribuna-naribunapa speaks of the yopa-yangpa’s origin which stems from the world of the spirits. The waribuna-naribunapa identifies yopa-yangpa as the agent of the life-giving water-spirit, the agent of peace and prosperity. The significance of this is that, in Sentanian thinking, the ondoporo is the friend of all the people: his own people, the outsiders, and the enemies of his people as well. The home of the ondoporo, therefore the home of his son the yopa-yangpa, belongs to all, and is therefore open to all kinds of people. The home of the ondoporo is the resting-place, a safe haven for friends and foes alike. The ondoporo is the mediator of all the people. Once the enemy of his people enter his house, his people must lay down their weapons, they cannot fight or kill the enemy under the protection of their ondoporo. What they must do is to be responsible for the well-being of their enemies, they must feed them, care for them, and see them depart peacefully. To touch the enemy while he is in the home of the ondoporo is to place themselves under the curse of the spirits who have installed the ondoporo as the waribuna-naribunapa.

Hebrews not only presents Jesus, God’s first-born, as King, He is also presented as the bridegroom. The words quoted in 1:9 come from Psalm 45:6-7, which depicts the wedding day of the king where the king is set above all His companions and anointed with the oil of gladness. Being a Messianic Psalm, Hebrews applies the message directly to Jesus. Jesus reigns supreme over all the kings of the earth. No earthly king did, or could have achieved, what Jesus achieved for all humanity. Jesus conquered

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⁶² Yo = village. pa = generic form for child, in this case son. yang = roof of house made of sago leaves.
⁶³ Wari = life or life substance. bu = water. na = from, originating from pa see n.61 above. nari = spirit.
Satan, the greatest enemy of humanity, who brought sin into the world, and controlled
death by His death on the cross (Heb 2:14-15).

If we relate this to the developing reflections of the Sentanians, Jesus could be
typically conceived as the greatest conqueror, the supreme warrior, the epitome of the
Sentanian community; He is the culmination of all the kosero and ondoporo. Jesus is
the apex of all Sentanian ancestors. He is the true yopa-yangpa.

In Hebrews 1:9, God has set Jesus above His companions. Some scholars equate
companions with the sanctified brothers of 2:11. These sanctified brothers represent the
readers of the Epistle, therefore the church. Since Psalm 45:6,7 speaks of the king’s
wedding, we see in Hebrews Jesus as the supreme warrior-groom who has taken to
Himself the church as His bride. The celebration in 1:9 represents the joyful worship of
God’s people. But the enthronement, in the context of 1:1-14, needs to be seen in
relation to the whole creation as well, as has been discussed above. The entire creation
eagerly awaits its full liberation or transformation. The Son of God, who put everything
together in the beginning, will roll them up and change them (1:10-12) at the end. Thus
the enthronement of the Son carries an eschatological dimension which is clearly
embodied in 1:13; 10:13. The Father has set the Son on the throne awaiting the
eschatological intervention when all His enemies, rebellious human beings, and spirit
powers, will be made His footstool. The arrival of the eschatological moment is the
But the eschatological moment is already here, with the coming of the Son into the
world (1:2). The enthronement of the Son at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven
shows that heaven and earth are united forever in Him. The eschatological union is now
in action. Jesus has opened the new and the living way by His body (10:20).

Past revelation has found its fulfilment in Jesus the Son of God.⁶⁴ Jesus is the
fulfilment of the great Jewish expectation.⁶⁵ These statements must include the
Melanesian past also. The above discussion of the Sentanian social structure
demonstrates this. By His incarnation, Jesus became one with Melanesian humanness.
In this respect He was also a Melanesian.⁶⁶ To call Jesus a Melanesian is to see Him as
the epitome of all Melanesian ancestors and its ancestral heritage.

⁶⁴ Guthrie, Hebrews, 46.
⁶⁵ Brown, Christ Above All, 28.
Instead of looking to the ancestors for life and meaning, Melanesians, like the readers of the Epistle to the Hebrews, must move forward with Christ. Far from escaping into the past, it beckons us on to a better future, with its firm assurance that the eternal Son of God is supreme and sufficient. The supremacy and sufficiency of Christ is stated 13 times in Hebrews by the adjective ‘better’. These statements summarize the two objectives of Hebrews: firstly, Hebrews shows Christ’s supremacy and sufficiency over all past mediators. The main purpose of the writer is to show the absolute supremacy of the Gospel revelation in the Son, who has accomplished a full and final reconciliation of God and man, over the imperfect revelation in the prophets. Secondly, Hebrews declares full and complete salvation in Jesus Christ. The main interest of the Epistle for theology lies in its soteriology, but its concentration upon the work of Christ has clear Christological implications which appear in its opening verses. The salvation Jesus brought is for Abraham’s descendants (2:16). Melanesians fully share in this salvation as Abraham’s descendants through faith in Jesus.

In Hebrews, salvation is firmly rooted in the Lordship of Jesus. The Son of God, seated at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven, echoes Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost, God has raised Jesus to life . . . exalted to the right hand of God (Acts 2:32-33). For Hebrews and for Peter, Jesus is seated on the throne as Lord, and so the statement, ‘in the beginning O Lord’ (1:10). And in Acts, Peter declares, ‘Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and

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67 Brown, Christ Above All, 8.
68 Bruce, Hebrews, 9. For references, see Heb 6:9; 7:7, 19, 22; 8:6, here twice as superior and once as better; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24.
71 On the idea of Abraham’s descendants, different scholarly views exist. For Anderson, Abraham’s descendants are the Jews. Anderson believes that since Paul’s references to Abraham are based on Genesis 15 and 17, his focus is different from Hebrews, which bases its argument on Genesis 22. For differences between Paul and Hebrews see Charles P. Anderson, ‘Who are the Heirs of the New Age in the Epistle to the Hebrews?’, in Marcus and Scards (eds.), Apocalyptic, 258-268. Bruce sees Abraham’s descendants as the whole family of faith, which is the same as, children of Abraham in Galatians 3:7, Hebrews, 51-52. Hughes agrees with the early Latin and Greek church fathers, the Reformers of the 16th century, and many modern-day scholars, that Abraham’s descendants (literally, the seed of Abraham) speaks of Christ’s incarnation. Hughes says this makes sense when it is linked with the statement, it is not angels He helps, Hebrews, 115-119. Hughes relates the idea of the seed of Abraham to God’s covenant with Abraham, with Christ as the focal point. He is the covenantal seed of Abraham, and His people are one with Him by spiritual incorporation into that same seed, without respect of race or culture, Ibid., 119.
Christ’ (2:36). Human salvation is the consequence of Jesus’ completed work on the cross.

5:6 SUMMARY

To summarize the discussion in this chapter, we state that Jesus the High Priest is God’s first-born Son whom God has placed ‘at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So He became as much superior to the angels as the name He inherited is superior to theirs’ (1:3-4). Jesus is on the throne to intercede for His people and to rule supremely over heaven and earth. He is on the throne installed by the Father in recognition of His victory over all the forces of evil. He is His people’s High Priest in the order of Melchizedek. As He has taken over the Melchizedekian and the Levitical priesthoods, Jesus, as the eternal High Priest is fully responsible for all who have faith in Him, Jews and Gentiles alike. Our discussion has also shown that according to Sentanian culture, Jesus as the Sentanian ondoporo kabang, is the Sentanian Supreme or number-one High Priest. The only way for Sentanians and all Melanesians to come to God is through Jesus Christ. In defeating Satan, who had power over death, Melanesians do not need to fear death, nor do they have to look to their dead ancestors to help them. As their yopayangpa and their waribuna-narihunapa, Jesus is their Supreme King and their life-giving Spirit, or their source of the living-water. As the people’s High Priest, Jesus offered Himself as their sacrifice to bring them into the family of God once-and-for-all.
CHAPTER SIX

CHRISTIANITY FOR A CHANGING CULTURE

6:1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter brings together the main issues discussed in chapters two to five to show the areas for continuity and discontinuity between Melanesian ancestral heritage and Christianity. Although Christianity has greatly influenced and changed the lives of the Melanesian people and their culture, Melanesians continue to regard Christianity as white-people’s religion.¹ In chapter three we pointed out that the Melanesian ancestral heritage prepared the way for the coming of Christianity. Now we are asking, should the two sets of beliefs exist side-by-side or should one give way to the other?

In response, the discussion in this chapter will cover the following three areas:

- Christianity for Melanesian Culture
- Christianity Challenging Melanesian Culture
- Christianity Providing Cultural Adaptation

6:2 CHRISTIANITY FOR MELANESIAN CULTURE

Melanesian culture is built on the wisdom and heritage passed down by Melanesian ancestors. Christianity is about the life and teachings of Jesus. Melanesian culture centred in the ancestors, and Christianity focussed on Jesus, each tradition has much to complement each other. The following areas will now be considered: the ancestors, salvation, faith, community, and leadership.

6:2:1 The Ancestors in Melanesian Thinking and Christianity

For Melanesians, their ancestral heritage is their source of strength, faith, and hope.² Community elders take pride in their ancestral heritage because it binds them to the past

and the present through their ancestors and their children\textsuperscript{3}. The ancestors, the elders, and the children represent the past, the present, and the future of the Melanesian community and its spirituality. To preserve a living continuity and its spiritual heritage, the elders must faithfully pass on to their children what they received from the ancestors.

The dead remember the living even though the former’s bodies have decayed. It is important to keep a good, culturally-accepted relationship with the dead who remember the living, and will reward them appropriately.\textsuperscript{4} This belief in a living continuity, as we discussed in chapters 2 and 3, comes from the fact that death does not destroy the life-force which leaves the body, meaning that it continues to exist in a different form.

The truth discussed here is a redemptive bridge to help Melanesians make a smooth crossover into the Christian teaching about life after death. Death does not destroy the sense of community where people live and relate to each other. In the Bible, the term ‘people’ is used for a family (Gen 32:8; 35:2), a tribe (Gen 46:16: Acts 4:27), a city (Gen 19:4), a nation (1Ki 12:27), or a racial group (Acts 17:26; Rev 7:9).\textsuperscript{5} Laurin’s summation of these concepts states:

but they are more than a collection of human beings. They are a psychic community, a unified whole made up of past and future generations, as well as the present, and existing at any one time in the individual with all their blessings and responsibilities . . . there is a common bond, a common soul, a common experience, stretching out over past, present, and future.\textsuperscript{6}

Melanesians honour and respect their ancestors as custodians of their past, present, and future. The Epistle to the Hebrews, to which we have been referring in this thesis, does the same thing with the ancestors of the Christian faith. They are referred to as ‘our forefathers’ or ancestors. Although these ancestors are dead, they continue to have a strong link with the new generation of men and women of faith, because these ancestors were the people to whom and through whom God spoke (1:1). This Biblical truth complements what Melanesians have held on to for generations before the coming of


\textsuperscript{6} \textit{Ibid.}, 401.
Christianity. This is to say, Melanesian ancestors and Biblical ancestors were/are custodians of the community faith.

What is of great interest to us is the way Hebrews places Jesus in the context of the ancestors (1:1-2). In my judgment, Hebrews does this because the writer wants us to see Jesus as an ancestor of the community. Jesus is presented here in the context of the faithful ancestors like Moses, Abraham, Joshua, Aaron, David, and all those listed in Hebrews chapter 11. Melanesians need to see these Biblical or Jewish ancestors as their ancestors, for three reasons: firstly, because Melanesians have welcomed Christianity as their way of life;\(^7\) secondly, through the concepts of ‘dual citizenship’ and ‘an adoptive past’ these Biblical ancestors are part of the ‘new kith and kin, of Melanesians;\(^8\) and, thirdly, the Melanesian practice of the \textit{papamama} family relationship makes these Biblical ancestors also Melanesian \textit{papamama}.\(^9\) The faithful ancestors mentioned in Hebrews spoke about Christ who was coming into the world. Thus, when Hebrews presents Jesus at the beginning in relation to the ancestors, Hebrews makes two important claims about Jesus: firstly, Jesus is the one the biblical ancestors spoke about; secondly, Jesus is the faithful ancestor.

But the title ‘ancestor’ is a designation given to the elders who have died. Does Jesus qualify to be an ancestor? Hebrews answers this question affirmatively in two specific ways.

In the first place, within the context of Hebrews chapter one, the title ‘Son’ is used retrospectively of Jesus’ accomplishment. Hebrews wants us to see the word ‘Son’ in 1:2 in relation to the designation of ‘Son’ in 1:5. The key to understanding verse five is the word ‘today’, which refers to the day when Jesus rose from the grave, the day of His resurrection. This retrospective understanding finds support in relation to the theme of Hebrews, which is the Priesthood of Jesus. Only a living person can be a priest. Concerning Jesus, Hebrews writes,

Now there were many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, He has a permanent Priesthood. Therefore He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them (Heb 7:23-5).

\(^9\) \textit{Ibid.}, \textit{et passim}.
In human understanding, ancestors were community elders, to whom we have referred before as *papamama*. They are dead physically, but according to Melanesian ancestral heritage and the teaching of the Bible, they continue to live on in a different mode of existence, but on the same plane with the living as Narokobi pointed out. They are therefore known as the 'living-dead'. In other words, an elder does not become an ancestor until he is dead. If human ancestors are called the living-dead, this title does not strictly fit Jesus, because Jesus eluded death, and is thus alive forever in the divines, so we are called to designate Jesus as the special 'Living Ancestor', one whom we are exhorted to rely upon in our journey of life. Jesus is qualified to be such an ancestor on the basis of His death and resurrection, and through His death and resurrection Jesus can enter into a personal relationship with believers as their ancestor who transcends, yet integrates all other relationships.

In the second place, as a truly human being, Hebrews presents Jesus as a Jewish ancestor, through His birth into the tribe of Judah (7:14). Since we have already identified Abraham, the Jewish ancestor as a Melanesian ancestor, and since Jesus is an ancestor of the Jewish tribe represented by Abraham, Melanesians are to see Jesus as their ancestor also. Once again, we see that there is a complementary relationship between the Melanesian and Biblical attitudes toward the ancestors.

The belief in ancestors being alive is built on the conviction that life continues to exist beyond death. The question to be raised here is where are the ancestors, or where would we find the ancestors? The Baktaman of Papua New Guinea would say the ancestors live in select caves because that is the place where the skulls of their great ones are. Other communities would say the ancestors are to be found in the spirit houses. More recently, in a changed Melanesia, Tuza has suggested that for the latter-day Roviana of the Solomons, the ancestors are to be found in church buildings, in the lives of the people and communities. Tuza’s suggestion comes from his findings in the western Solomon Islands where leading leaders are buried near the church, and the Holy Spirit is said to be living in the body of church prophet, Silas Eto (Holy Mama). Tuza’s findings also relate to the fact that Melanesians remember their ancestors because of what they did, and were, and because the people see their presence in the community around them.

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10 This understanding is evaluated below in light of biblical teaching.
11 This thesis, chapter 5, pages 143-155.
According to Hebrews, the spirits of the believing ancestors are in the presence of God in heaven: ‘You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made holy’ (11:5, 16, 40; 12:23). This is new information for the Melanesians. Melanesians need Christianity to make clear to them where their ancestors are. They are not in the caves, or in the spirit houses, or in the church buildings. Those ancestors who believed in God are in heaven with Him. They have gone ‘to Jesus the Mediator of a new covenant’ (12:24a). The ancestors who did not believe in God are in hell away from God. They do not live on the same plane with the living as Narokobi has claimed. Melanesians can continue to remember their ancestors as they have done in the past, they can thank God for the faith, the commitment, and the achievements of their ancestors, and together with their believing ancestors, worship God through Jesus Christ, and look to Him for strength and direction in life. Melanesian belief is centred in the ancestors being alive after death, and this comes to be confirmed by the teaching of the Bible focussed on Jesus Christ as the living ancestor in whose presence the believing ancestors are today. The ancestors are with Jesus, who died for their salvation.

6:2:2 The Concept of Salvation in Melanesian Ancestral Heritage and Christianity

In Melanesia, salvation is concerned with good, harmonious, or peaceful relationships between the people in the community, the ancestors, and the environment to which the people belong. Various expressions in Pidgin like: i stap gut – keeping a good life, i stap strett – having an orderly life, i stap klin – being clean physically and ritually, i stap holi – being holy, are salvation terms which represent completeness of life. Mantovani sees ‘the completeness of life’, with its equivalent gutpela sindaun or i stap gut in Pidgin, as the key to understanding the Melanesian concept of salvation.

The key values seem to be what in Pidgin is called ‘gupela sindaun’ and which I, for the lack of a better term, call ‘life’ in inverted commas, which means good relationships, prestige, security, health, wealth, meaning, success in everything. This ‘life’ is holistic and includes every aspect of human existence. It is cosmic as it effects the whole cosmos.

Melanesians communities are relational in nature. Everything exists in relation to other human beings, the non-human, the animals, the above and the below, the visible and the invisible, the living and the dead, in a holistic entity or cosmos. The ancestors are the

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basis of Melanesian spirituality. They are the glue which holds the community together. The community relationship to the ancestors constitutes Melanesian spirituality.

Mantovani has argued that when the living made offerings of one kind or another, these were done in the context of sharing among people who knew each other. These offerings, Mantovani says, are not to be seen as sacrifices made to the ancestors, but are expressions of the social interaction and interdependency they had enjoyed with each other. Whether we call the offerings sacrifice or exchange, however, the crucial issue is the involvement of the ancestors. Melanesians understand gutpela sindaun or salvation in relation to their ancestors. Traditionally, Melanesians viewed their ancestors as providers of gutpela sindaun. Mantovani revokes this line of thinking by saying that the ancestors are participants of gutpela sindaun together with the community. I maintain that Melanesians looked to their ancestors and expected them to provide gutpela sindaun. In other words, Melanesians consider their ancestors to be the channel of gutpela sindaun. I believe the community looked to the ancestors for this gutpela sindaun because, in Melanesian thinking, salvation is related to the concepts of time, space, history, and Lo, which are directly related to the ancestors.¹⁰

The opposite to gutpela sindaun is i stap long hevi, that is ‘having problems’. In the mind of the people, problems, sickness, drought, and death, are associated with the activities of the spirits. When something bad happens to an individual, or in the community, the first question that comes to mind is, ‘who did it?’ For Melanesians who live with spirit-consciousness all the time, sicknesses and all kinds of ill-fortune are associated with the activities of the spirits, ancestral and other spirits. When the Sentanian priest burns coconut husks for a sick person before they go to the hospital nowadays, the priest asks the ancestral spirit to watch over the sick person, to protect that person from other spirits and powers, and to ensure that the sick person will receive gutpela sindaun.¹⁷ When the Wape people of the Torricelli mountains of the West Sepik Province of Papua New Guinea shot the fish masks with arrows at the end of their feasting time to bid farewell to the spirits and ask for healing, they knew that sicknesses were caused by the spirits.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid., 22-28.
¹⁶ See this thesis, chapter 3, pages 89-92.
¹⁷ This thesis, chapter 4, page 129.
¹⁸ McGregor, The Fish and the Cross, 61.
The Melanesian understanding of salvation is closely related to the Biblical idea of deliverance or freedom from want, hurt, or starvation.\textsuperscript{19}

6:2:3 Community in Melanesian Thinking and Christianity

The major concern about salvation from the Melanesian point view, as outlined above, is relationship within the totality of their community. From conception to the grave, and beyond the grave, the relationship with the community continues to go on. Christianity is also about relationship within the community through Jesus Christ as God's Son. The prologue to Hebrews presents Jesus in the setting of a human community, 'but in these last days He (God) has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the world' (1:2).

Just as a Melanesian son is born into a community, so Jesus was born into a family, a clan, a tribe, and a nation — born with an hereditary root, born into a community determined by relationships. Narokobi condensed this fundamental community bond for living into one statement, 'Man [sic] is born according to most ancient legends, either of man [sic] himself, or birds and animals, or other entities.'\textsuperscript{20}

A different way of stating what Narokobi has said would be: a Melanesian is born with hereditary roots. He is given a family name, is entitled to all the family possessions, including: his father's kose, bows and arrows, fighting and hunting spears, canoe, sago, coconut and betel nut palms (for a coastal person), hunting and gardening grounds, fishing and drinking water.\textsuperscript{21}

If Jesus was a Melanesian, the above hereditary roots of identification into Melanesian community as a son would apply to Him. In chapter 5, we identified Jesus as a Melanesian. He is the ondoporo kabang, the yopa-yangpa (Son of the village, and the roof), and the ancestor of the Sentani people. Jesus was born into a human community to provide gutpela sindaun proclaimed by the Old Testament ancestors. So the concept of gutpela sindaun about which Melanesians were concerned, is the concern of Christianity also. But, according to Christianity, Jesus is the source and the fullness of this gutpela sindaun.

In order to enjoy gutpela sindaun, broken relationships have to be restored. Material compensation or retribution was carried out to restore the broken relationship.

\textsuperscript{19} Carl Loeliger, 'Biblical Concept of Salvation', in Knight (ed.), Christ in Melanesia, 134-145.
\textsuperscript{20} Narokobi, 'Religious Experience', in Knight (ed.), Christ in Melanesia, 8.
\textsuperscript{21} Daimoi, 'Struggles Faced', in May (ed.), A Reader, 125.
The highest compensation payment carried out was life in exchange for life. Compensation or retributive actions were carried out for the purpose of restoring community harmony or salvation. Without compensation there would be no harmony or salvation between individuals or communities. Compensation or retribution is at the heart of the Christian message. This point will be taken up below. There is a parallel between compensation practised by the Melanesians and that which Christianity came to proclaim.

6:2:4 The Concept of Faith in Melanesian Thinking and Christianity

In this thesis we have spoken about Melanesians believing in someone or something without defining what belief or faith is. To believe is to be religious. As religion is part of the Melanesian way of life, faith needs to be seen in the same way also. Faith is a way of life for the Melanesians. To speak of ancestral beliefs and practices is to speak about Melanesians having faith or believing in their ancestors who formulated the way of life for the people. Melanesian religion and belief, based on ancestral heritage, consists of 'do's and don'ts'. The Yagaria people of Finchhafen use the word bonona, or its shortened form bono, for religion, and its meaning is the matter which is central to one's life or which gives meaning to one's life. . . . It stood for rules and regulations for a good and wholesome life, the do's and don'ts for everyone, referring to all aspects of life, such as gardening, pig-raising, hunting, warfare, the secret cult of men, moral behaviour, etc. The young men in seclusion for initiation were taught bono. The pre-Christian faith the Melanesians had, based on ancestral heritage, was one of earning merits with the ancestors. This faith was based on keeping ancestral rules and regulations. The people had to follow the ancestral Lo in order to experience gutpela sindaun.

The Christian message the missionaries brought is also about faith for living in this world, and in the world of the dead. Christianity not only complements the Melanesian concept of faith, it adds two further ingredients to it. Firstly, the concept of faith in Christianity is about a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ brings people into a spiritual father-child relationship with God. This point is taken up further below. The second thing about the Christian faith is that it is

22 See page 209, point 6:3:3.3.
faith or a relationship with Jesus. To explain this according to the Sentanian culture, it means being born under the kose of Jesus, which means being born into His house – the home of Jesus, the Ondoporo Kabang. To be born into the home of Jesus is to be born into His family or the family of God. This in turn means being born as a child of God. More discussion on this is presented below.  

There exists then, a positive relationship between faith in the ancestors and faith in Jesus. The way to have faith in Jesus is a matter of explaining it in Melanesian cultural understanding. Many Melanesians and missionaries who preach and teach God’s Word have not explained faith in Jesus as stated above.

6:2:5 The Concept of Environment in Melanesian and Christian Thinking

Melanesians see the environment (non-human), the human (the living and the dead), and the spirits (good and bad) as components of the holistic community in which they live. The operational word for this holistic community, as we have discussed through this thesis is relationship.  

The traditional Melanesian community and the present-day Melanesian ‘Christian’ community are built on relational living, ‘a living dialogue between man [sic] and nature in his total existence’. The environment to which the community belongs was created or acquired by the ancestors as an inheritance for their descendants. The people depend on the environment to give them strength and health. This ‘living dialogue’ is the life-force or the glue that binds the human, the non-human, and the spirit communities in relationship with each other – a three-dimensional relationship. The ancestors, as part of the human community, control the environment as papa bilong graun (owners of the environment). The environment is the community’s supermarket. A good relationship with the ancestors means the gardens will produce well, the jungles will be full of game, and the waters will be teeming with water creatures.

The environment, furthermore, pointed the people to beings greater than their ancestors. The belief in these formidable beings with great powers, referred to inter alia in this thesis as Supreme Beings, made it possible for the primal people to believe in the existence of the true God. This is broadly true of the South Pacific peoples.

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24 Discussed on page 216.
27 This thesis, chapter 3, pages 64-68.
Long before the arrival of the missionaries, the Creator God gave the Melanesians guidance and direction from the universe around them. The Southern Cross in the sky at night, the movement of the sun during the day, guided the people to navigate their way across the waters. The appearance of the morning star announced the break of a new day. The sound and the patterns of the waves at night told them of the presence of land or other islands. The position of the moon determined planting and harvesting, hunting and fishing seasons. The rumbling of the thunder across the sky told them of a being greater and mightier than human beings. These experiences provided Melanesians with cultural redemptive analogies as bridges to cross over from their world into the world of the Bible, from the physical to the spiritual, from the transient to the eternal, from longing to reality, from their ancestors to Christ.

Christianity has a lot to do with the environment in which the people live. When Hebrews presents Jesus in the context of the ancestors, it does so in the context of the community. The three-dimensional community in which the Melanesians live is spoken of in Hebrews in relation to Jesus. Jesus is the creator of the non-human world, or the environment, ‘but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe’ (Heb 1:2). The human community, in relation to Jesus, is presented in terms of the past and the present, that is, the dead and the living communities, respectively identified as ‘our forefathers’ and ‘us’ (Heb 1:1,2). Furthermore, the human community is one for which Jesus ‘provided purification for sins’ (Heb 1:3c). The spirit community is represented by the relationship between Jesus and the angels (the good spirits).\(^{28}\) On the existence of the three-dimensional community, Mantovani says, ‘that bios, that life, is not limited to humans, but is cosmic, it refers to “every creature” – humans, animals, vegetables, the whole world.’\(^{29}\)

On the relationship between Biblical stories and the legends, and the folk-lore of Melanesians which form the foundation of the Melanesian world-view, James Chalmers, a pioneer missionary of the London Missionary Society to Papua New Guinea, as early as the 1890s said,

From the legends and folk-lore which I have gathered among the tribes of New Guinea I might give many illustrations which closely resemble early Biblical

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\(^{29}\) ‘Fundamental’, in Knight (ed.), *Christ in Melanesia*, 156.
stories. Others are affiliated to ancient Greek and Roman myths. Some tribes give different versions of the same thing. There are also certain fundamental truths which have always had a credence there—such as that man possesses a soul which can have a distinct existence apart from the body. They believe also in the future happy state of the dead; and in the interest which the departed ones still retain in those they have left behind.\(^3^0\)

There is definitely a close parallel between the Melanesian and Christian understanding of the environment, or the world in which Melanesians live.

6:2:6 The Place and Power of Leadership

In Melanesia, leadership is on the basis of heredity and achievement. The Sentanian leadership, as we have seen, is an hereditary one. This hereditary leadership is determined by the kose to which the individual belongs. Our previous discussion shows that the highest leadership position in Sentani culture belongs to the ondoporo kabang (the number-one leader, or the chief). According to the pattern set up by Mahowe, the eponymous ancestor of the Sentanian people, the hereditary leadership of the ondoporo belongs to the first-born son. This is a permanent leadership structure.

If the ondoporo kabang has more than one son, the leadership by heredity goes with the first-born son, never with the other sons. If the second or third son of the ondoporo is married first and has a son as his first-born, his son cannot become the ondoporo kabang, for that position belongs rather to the son of the first-born. However, if the ondoporo kabang's first-born son dies young, then the hereditary right goes with the second son. In Sentanian culture the children of the first-born (son or daughter) always remain aka (older brother or sister) even if they are younger than the children of the second- or the third-born. As for leadership by achievement, it is a more flexible or open leadership (even though it is also expected to be reflected in any ondoporo kabang). A good orator, warrior, hunter, gardener, a person with great wisdom and understanding, a person with great wealth (wife or wives, many children, pigs, big piece of land), a good business person is considered a leader by his community. This is leadership by acknowledgment rather than heredity.

In chapter five of this thesis, we have shown how Jesus perfectly fits into both patterns of leadership found in Melanesia. As God's first-born son, Jesus is qualified to be ondoporo kabang. The ondoporo, or ondoporo kabang, according to the Sentanian

\(^3^0\) Hitchen, 'Tamate', 349.
hereditary system is entitled to have two *koses*, one projecting out of each end of the roof-beam of his house. In our discussion about Jesus in relation to Melchizedek and Abraham, we have said, Jesus is entitled to have two *koses* for His house, because He represents the combined *koses* of Melchizedek and Abraham, respectively symbolizing the heavenly and the earthly *koses*. Since God has only one Son, Jesus is eternally the *ondoporo kabang* of His people. Jesus is also qualified to be a leader by achievement because He has won the greatest battle, the battle against Satan, sin, and death (Heb 2:14-15) – hence the ‘Pioneer’ title.

The leadership structures existing among Melanesians when carefully studied, become redemptive analogies and cultural bridges for effective communication of the Gospel. In every culture there are structures and systems fore-ordained by God, like the Melchizedek-Abraham example we have looked at. These structures are placed there by God for His use to make Godself (to use Mantovani’s terminology) revelation clear to the people.31

Melanesian ancestral heritage and Christianity, far from being poles apart, have many areas to complement each other. At the same time we need to recognize that there are areas of need in the lives of Melanesians which Christianity is better equipped to meet than Melanesian ancestral heritage.

6:3 CHRISTIANITY CHALLENGING MELANESIAN CULTURE

‘Humankind has existed for many thousand of years – in PNG, up to 50,000 years – whilst Abraham came to the scene not more than 4,000 years ago, which is very recent in historical terms.’32 When compared with Melanesian culture, Christianity is a newcomer to the Oceania region, of just over 150 years. When one considers the welcome Pacific Islanders have given to this newcomer, after some strong initial opposition to its intrusion, one has to admit Christianity was meant for the Melanesians, Polynesians, and Micronesians, the three ethnic groups inhabiting the islands of the south-west Pacific. Trompf has succinctly summarized the present stage of Christianity in these island nations:

The influence of Christianity on the local peoples of the south-west Pacific has been enormous. Some may question the depth of its reception in this or that particular area; some may point to the extraordinary resilience of Australian

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aboriginal religions in the face of the high-flown teachings that accompanied the great white flood; and some may admit that Christianity is likely to lose ground in the future because of secularizing tendencies or home-grown pragmatisms. Still its widespread acceptance, and the degree of its incorporation into local cultures are truly remarkable. The 1980 census of Papua New Guinea, for instance, showed that 96 percent of the country’s inhabitants associated themselves with some Christian denomination or mission. Sheer nominalism taken into account, this betokens an extraordinary social transformation in a country where sizable inland populations were barely touched by the outside world until after the Second World War.\textsuperscript{33}

There exists a healthy tension between Christianity and the Pacific culture in the above summary, as indicated by the statement of the possibility that ‘Christianity is likely to lose ground in the future’. While Christianity and the Melanesian ancestral heritage share many things in common, Christianity is, and will continue to be, a challenge to the Melanesian culture. As Melanesians continue in their faith-journey in Christ, they need to face the following challenges from the perspective of Christianity, clearly and decisively.

6:3:1 The Influence of the Ancestors on the Community

The relationship of the ancestors with the living members of the community is one of the major concerns of this thesis. Christianity agrees with Melanesian belief in the existence of life after death. Having embraced Christianity as the Melanesian way of life, what should Melanesians now do about their relationship with their ancestors?

We have reached a position in this thesis where we need to answer the question very specifically. I propose to answer this question on the basis of the teaching of the Bible, using the Epistle to the Hebrews as my starting-point, but will use other relevant Scripture passages also.

However, first let me suggest a number of things why I believe the Bible should be used to answer the question. In the first place, Christian Melanesians have accepted the Bible as their guiding star, a light to guide them in their journey in Christian faith with Jesus as their Lord. In the second place, Christian Melanesians see the Bible as the one book through which God directs them in their decision-making. In the third place, believers use the Bible in their individual and communal times of worship to grow strong in their Christian life and commitment. They see the Bible containing ‘spiritual food and drink’ for their long journey in life. In the fourth place, Melanesians are committed to translating the Bible into their languages because it is the foundation for their community life to help them grow in their knowledge and understanding of Jesus. As Kirene Yandit explains,

Even though parts of the New Testament have been translated into my own language, my people see Jesus as an isolated person not really relating to them in their daily lives. Jesus is seen only as a name tag, or a ticket into heaven, but does not relate to every aspect of their daily life and culture.

But Yandit knows how currently important it is for his community to go beyond this superficiality. In the fifth place, God uses the Bible to reveal the hidden secrets of human lives in the way that no other book can do.

The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joint and marrow; it judges the thought and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account (4:12-13).

Given the above reasons, one would question Mantovani’s statement when he says,

God reveals Godself through creation: actually, through what people perceive of creation. Creation is never seen ‘as it is’ but as it is mediated through culture. It is culture that mediates God’s revelation. In this sense, one can say that God reveals Godself through culture. This implies that every experience of God and every sharing of that experience is necessarily cultural. The Bible does not, and cannot, transcend these limitations: [the] Bible also is a cultural document expressing universal truth.

The science of anthropology and culture have helped Christian missionaries to accept people of other cultures as they are, to learn and understand their culture in order to

36 Kirene Yandit, ‘Priorities in Translating the Bible’, 60.
37 Mantovani, Divine Revelation, 4.
communicate the Gospel effectively. This knowledge has broadened and deepened my appreciation for my own culture. Nevertheless, even though I believe that creation and culture point us to the existence and power of God, of which the Melanesian ancestors were very conscious, I maintain that they were unable to find the Godself, because neither creation nor culture had the capacity to reveal Godself to them. I take Godself to mean the person and the attributes of God as Jesus came to reveal them. Jesus affirmed the Bible as the book in which human beings will find the truth about Him. In helping two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus to understand what had happened to Him, we read, ‘And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself’ (Lk 24:27). At the conclusion of his Gospel, John writes, ‘Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name’ (Jn 20: 30, 31).

The Bible is a critical book for Melanesians. The Bible does transcend cultural limitations by making the people understand who God is and what He has done in Jesus to bring the people back to God. Whether Melanesians can have a true knowledge of God without the coming of Christian missionaries and without the Bible will continue to remain a challenging question. But to imply that the knowledge of anthropology and culture is sufficient for people to know God, as Mantovani suggests, is wrong and misleading. It can lead Melanesians into believing that their culture can save them, without God’s revelation in Jesus contained in the Bible.

Having cleared some preliminary matters in relation to the Bible, we return to consider the influence of the ancestors on the community from a Biblical perspective.

6:3:1:1 The Ancestors Are God’s Mediators

God spoke to the ancestor-mediators about His great plan to be ushered in by Jesus, His Son (Heb1:1,2). As God’s new spokesperson, Jesus is introduced into the argument as a new Mediator, one who both supersedes the past mediators, and yet fulfils all their expectations. ‘Whatever God has made known before is now superseded by His revelation through His Son.’ The past ancestors have been superseded by Jesus, but the message they declared is now to be continued by Jesus. As Brown points out,

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38 Guthrie, Hebrews, 29.
‘Christ does not break with the great Jewish past. He comes to bring it to fulfilment’.\(^{39}\) Instead of returning to the past, Hebrews takes the believing community into the future with Jesus. ‘Far from escaping into the past, it beckons us on to a better future, with its firm assurance that the eternal Son is supreme and sufficient’.\(^{40}\) By way of encouragement, Hebrews assures the community that Jesus is absolutely reliable and sufficient. Hebrews uses the word ‘better’ 13 times to drive home to the community the fact that Jesus will take better care of them than their ancestors or past mediators. This is an important message for Melanesians.

Jesus, rather than human culture, has better things in store for those who have come to salvation in Him (6:9); a better hope is to be found in Him alone (7:19); He is ‘the guarantee of a better covenant (7:22) since His Priesthood is founded on better promises (8:6); He is the better sacrifice which purifies heavenly things (9:23); has better and lasting possessions for those who are prepared to suffer for Him (10:34); such possessions as: a better country and city (11:16), a better resurrection (11:35), a better perfection (11:40), and blood which bespeaks better things for humanity (12:24).\(^{41}\) The better things described in these verses are directly related to the salvation that God has once-and-for-all brought about through Jesus Christ ‘as the Son of God and High Priest’.\(^{42}\)

The salvation Jesus offers is based on ‘the power of an indestructible life’, and not on the basis of clan or nationality. As God and High Priest, Jesus rules and intercedes, free of racial or national prejudices. As the new Mediator or Ancestor, Jesus supersedes and fulfils all that the human ancestors stood for and did, including the Melanesian ancestors. On the basis of what Jesus achieved and offers, He challenges Melanesians to relate to Him as their Ancestor and trust in Him as their Mediator before God.

6:3:1:2 The Ancestors are in God’s Care
As their new Ancestor and Mediator, Jesus challenges Melanesians to relate to Him for all their needs, physical and spiritual, community and individual. But, if Jesus is the

\(^{39}\) Christ Above All, 28.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 8.

\(^{41}\) Bruce, Hebrews, n. 38, page 9.

only person we have to relate to, then what about our ancestors who continue to be part of our community? What do we do about them and their needs?

The answer to the first part of the question is that all believers, including the believing ancestors, are in the presence of God. They make up the house of God placed under the care of Jesus (Heb 3:6). The house in this passage consists of Jewish and Gentile believers. The identity of this house, and its membership, is presented in Hebrews 12:22-24. In this passage, the house is called ‘the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God’ (verse 22). The house is further identified as ‘the church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven’ (verse 23). ‘The heavenly Jerusalem’ called ‘the new Jerusalem’, and ‘the church of the first-born’ is called ‘the bride’ (Rev 21:2). In Hebrews 12:22-24 the members of this house include: the believers to whom Hebrews was sent, spoken of as ‘you have come’ (verse 22). The statement ‘you have come’ would include the present-day believers also, wherever they live. The next group of members are the angels in their ‘thousands upon thousands’ (verse 22); then comes ‘the church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven’ (verse 23); followed by God, ‘the judge of all men’ (verse 23); followed by ‘the spirits of righteous men made perfect’ (verse 23); and last of all ‘Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant’ (verse 24).

This house is one united community of heaven and earth. The ancestors are mentioned here as ‘the spirits of righteous men [and women] made perfect’. This group of people are all the past or dead believing men and women of the Old Testament, who are the ancestors of faith, some of whom are mentioned in Hebrews 11, and other believing men and women, young and old, who have died. Today, this group would include New Testament believers and the recipients of Hebrews, along with all the believers of the world who are dead. This entire group is spoken of as ‘a great cloud of witnesses’ (12:1).

These believing ancestors are in heaven in the presence of God and Jesus Christ. They are in heaven because of their faith in the new covenant Jesus established through His death. This is new and exciting news about the ancestors which Christianity has opened up for Melanesians to know and understand God’s great care for all His people. This adds new information to the propositions we found earlier in Tuzza’s article. The believing ancestors have not moved from the sope, or the spirit house, into the church. They have moved from their transient earthly dwelling into the heavenly new Jerusalem,
forever united with God and Jesus Christ. God has prepared a heavenly city for them. We must not deprive them of the better things God wants them to have and enjoy.

A further truth to be learned from this is that those who are identified as ‘the spirits of righteous men made perfect’ (12:23), are not just the believing ancestors, they are all believers, both young and old from all over the world. The strong implication is that they are the innumerable multitudes from every nation, tribe, people, and language (Rev 7:9). This new truth, Melanesian ancestral heritage, due to its cultural and tribal orientation, could not provide for all the people. This new truth was not available to humanity until Jesus came. Today, Jesus challenges Melanesians to include the other members of the community who are in His care as their ‘kith and kin’.

Because the believing dead are under the care of Jesus, Melanesians are challenged to think about their relationship with Jesus. This is because membership of the heavenly community includes believers who are still alive, identified as ‘the church of the first-born whose names are written in heaven’ (12:23). Thus, according to Hebrews, the earthly counterpart of the church of the first-born is all the people, young and old, whose names are written in heaven, or as John puts it ‘those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life’ (Rev 21:27). The way to become a member of this earthly-heavenly community is through faith in the death of Jesus. The sacrifice Jesus made remains fresh and powerful day by day, as Hebrews says, ‘the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel’ (12:24).

The blood of Abel called out for revenge – a just retribution? The blood of Jesus, unlike that of Abel, called out, and continues to call out, for mercy and forgiveness. Mercy and forgiveness are powerful Christian principles the Christian message has brought to Melanesia. Jesus, by His personal example, powerfully challenges Melanesians to practise mercy and forgiveness rather than retribution. Mercy and forgiveness offer life, while negative retribution destroys life. The retribution Jesus offered in mercy and forgiveness is a once-for-all action.

The context of Hebrews 12:22-24 presents Jesus as the Mediator of the living and the dead. He is the only one perfectly qualified to fulfil this ministry. The faithful and effective mediatorial ministry of Jesus cancels out the necessity for other mediators, be they angels, or human ancestors. The believing ancestors are in heaven in the presence of God. This was part of the promise Jesus made to His disciples prior to His death, ‘In My Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I
am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am’ (Jn 14:2-3).

Now that the believing ancestors are in heaven in the care of God the Father and Jesus Christ His Son, we move on to answer the second part of the question raised above, ‘What should Melanesians do about their ancestors, or how should they remember them?’

Without fear, Melanesians should think of ways to honour or remember their ancestors and other members of their families who have gone to be with Jesus. Since the living members of ‘the church of the first-born’, that is, believers on earth who constitute this church, celebrate their birthdays, it will be good for different families to keep celebrating the birthdays of those who are with Jesus. The church in Melanesia should think of setting aside one Sunday in the calendar to remember the dead in the same way as fathers and mothers are remembered. This would be a healthy honouring of the preparatory work of the Spirit in each culture. It would be a powerful reminder of the dead, and would provide a further opportunity to thank Jesus for what He did, and for caring for the ‘living-dead’ in His home.

The Biblical truth discussed so far presents a further challenge to the Melanesian practice of offering sacrifices, or (as Mantovani says) gifts of food in gratitude to the ancestors. Whether we call it a sacrifice or a gift, Melanesians spend a great deal of energy, time, and money in carrying out this ritual of remembrance. Should we encourage this kind of practice? This ritual continues to be practised today, out of fear that the dead, whom we do not see, will be angry if they are not offered their part of the share of what the living ones have. The dead, as we have just pointed out, are in the care of God the Father and Jesus Christ. There are no better people to care for the dead than God the Father and Jesus Christ.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31 contains a number of important issues about the relationship between the living and the dead. Firstly, there is consciousness in the world of the dead. The rich man ended up in hell (verse 23), a place of torment (verse 23), agony and fire (verse 24). In his agony he called out to Abraham to send Lazarus to him with some water to cool his tongue. Second, there is remembrance in the world of the dead. The rich man remembered his five brothers. He asked Abraham to send Lazarus to warn them so that they would not end up in the same

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43 For Mantovani’s preference to interpret food offered to the ancestors as gifts rather than sacrifice, see his *Divine Revelation, et passim.*
place he was (verse 28). The lesson for Melanesians is, if the dead do communicate at all, they will be telling the people to read the Scriptures and to follow its teachings (verse 29), rather than demanding retribution.\(^{44}\) The voice from the world of the dead challenges Melanesians to read God’s word and live by it. Thirdly, the dead are in one of two places. They are either with Abraham and Lazarus in the place of happiness (verse 22), or with the rich man in hell, the place of torment and agony. Writing about the rich man and Lazarus being separated by a great chasm, Leon Morris says, ‘The rich man can know how it is with Lazarus (and vice versa) but there is no crossing of the chasm on the part of either’.\(^{45}\) God has given us His Word to guide us in our relationship with others and to prepare us for life with God. Fourthly, the dead are not allowed to return because the living have God’s word to guide them.

The story of the prophet Samuel returning from the dead to talk to King Saul (1 Sam 28:3-19) tells us that when Samuel came to Saul, he confirmed to the king what he had already prophesied to him: the Lord had torn his kingdom from him and given it to one of Saul’s neighbours, one better than him (1 Sam 28:16-19; 1 Sam 15:27-29). Because Saul was desperate, God sent Samuel back from the dead to confirm what God had already told Saul. God sent Samuel to talk with Saul in the same way He sent Moses and Elijah to talk with Jesus (Lk 9:28-36). Moses and Elijah represented the Pentateuch and the prophets, the full Bible of the early Christians. Saul disobeyed God, so the kingdom was taken away from him. Jesus has fully obeyed God’s Word, the kingdom will be given to Him. In Hebrews 1:8, in recognition of His total obedience to the word of God and His victory over death, God the Father re-instated Jesus on the throne as God and King to rule over His kingdom with righteousness. The principle is that God does what He has said in His Word. To do God’s will, Christians must read and study the Bible.\(^{46}\)

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 72-73 for discussion on this.


6:3:2 Jesus and the Supreme Being

Different Melanesian communities knew of the existence of a Supreme Being. This knowledge contributed to their understanding of the God of the Bible. The people who live in the Mount Hagen area of the Western Highlands of Papua New Guinea, as mentioned in chapter three of this thesis, called out to this Supreme Being as Ogla Nuknu in times of desperate need.\(^47\) We have said in this thesis the great Supreme Being or the great ancestral spirit was close to the people at one time but removed himself to a distant place, to the sky above or to the far west. To many communities this great Supreme Being is their equivalent of the God of the Bible, whether they referred to Him as Father or by some other name.\(^48\) The people of the Yagaria-speaking area in Finchhafen, have two words for understanding God. Firstly, ube, a pre-Christian word used for the origin of certain things or some groups of people, the word possibly having some totemic association.\(^49\) The other word is souve, the equivalent of the Hebrew word יהוה (YHWH) translated as ‘LORD’, or kyrios in the Greek. The Yagaria people used the word for a great warrior, ‘the big man who took the initiative in war’.\(^50\)

The terms and concepts are examples of the richness of Melanesian culture which prepared the people for the coming of Christian missionaries who bore the Gospel message, and for communicating that message in the different communities in Melanesia. For the Sentanians such concepts as kose, ondoporo, waribuna-naribunapa,
yopa-yangpa, yodoo-yangdo, and yoniki are rich theological expressions to contextualize the Gospel for the people.

The theological or theistic (God-centred) concepts and symbols are not the only cultural bridges for understanding and communicating the Gospel. Mantovani, for the last 25 years or so, has been strongly promoting the symbolism of bio-cosmism, mentioned in chapter two, representing ‘Life’ from within the cosmic constituency. Bio-cosmism is built around a dema, a human-non-human being who offered himself or herself (a mother, an elder brother, a sister) to be killed and buried in order to produce or to give ‘life’ to the cosmos to provide for and sustain human life. The dema is buried and remains in the grave. Out of the decaying life, new life is brought forth. It is probably right to consider bio-cosmic religion as an extension of the theistic one since it is based on ‘something coming from outside the human sphere’. The danger of applying this concept to Christ as the Lamb of God is that, whereas the dema figure decays in the grave, Jesus died and rose victoriously from the grave. Had Jesus remained in the grave, Christianity would have had nothing to offer to the world.

Our task under this section is to relate God’s final and definitive revelation in Jesus to the belief in a, or the, Supreme Being. In other words, we have to relate the above discussion to God’s revelation in Jesus. The first three verses of the prologue of Hebrews clearly set out the uniqueness of Jesus. Firstly, Hebrews sees the coming of Jesus as the end of one period and the beginning of another one, as expressed in the statement ‘but in these last days’. The time for searching is over. God the Supreme Being has revealed Himself in a human body in the person of Jesus. This truth challenges Melanesians to approach, or come into a personal relationship with, God or the Supreme Being through Jesus Christ only. The Supreme Being existed all the time. Melanesians were conscious of His presence, but had no way of coming to know Him in a personal way.

The way for human beings to come to Him did not exist until Jesus died and rose again from death. By His sacrificial death Jesus opened up ‘a new and living way . . . to draw near to God’ (Heb 10:20,22). Even if some communities in Melanesia knew the Supreme Being as ‘Father’, they never saw Him nor had a personal relationship with

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51 Mantovani, Divine Revelation, his chapter 4, ‘Bio-cosmic Religious Experience.’ The entire manual is about bio-cosmism considered missiologically from different perspectives.
52 Ibid., 27. For limitations and differences between bio-cosmic and theistic religions, see page 36.
53 Ibid., 36.
Him. In Jesus, the 'Father' has come to take His children home (Heb 2:9-11). Jesus is God's first-born (Heb 1:6). Jesus is not ashamed to call all who have been made pure by His blood, 'brothers', and by implication, sisters, and Himself their elder brother (Heb 2:10). He gave up His life willingly to purify His brothers and sisters, '[a]fter He had provided purification for sins' (1:3). His death has produced 'Life', which in John's Gospel Jesus calls 'life to the full or abundant life' (Jn 10:10). Jesus is the 'abundant Life' for all humanity and for the total cosmic order. In his prologue, John calls Jesus Logos, or the Word, which brought life and light to humanity (Jn 1:4). In this thesis we have identified Jesus as the Greatest or Cosmic Ancestor. Melanesians looked to their ancestors for life and well-being. It would not be out of place to substitute 'Word' in John's prologue with 'Ancestor'. Thus the prologue would read, 'In the beginning was the Ancestor, and the Ancestor was with God, and the Ancestor was God. He was with God in the beginning' (Jn 1:1-2).

The Supreme Being, or God the Father, has revealed Himself in Jesus His first-born Son. Melanesians can hold to this belief in the Supreme Being, or God the Father. What they have to do now is to transfer their belief in the ancestors to wholeheartedly trust in Jesus Christ as their life-giving Ancestor. They are challenged to enter into a personal relationship with God, the Supreme Being through faith in Jesus.

6:3:3 Jesus: Brother Warrior of Melanesians

Melanesians honour and worship their ancestors as great warriors, and men of great achievements. To die a warrior's death was an honour a Melanesian man would not turn his back on. In various societies, to capture the head of an enemy, and to feast on his flesh were the marks of a great warrior.54 The eating of enemy flesh signified victory over the enemy, the acquisition of enemy strength, public humiliation and shame for the enemy, and an open invitation for the enemy to take revenge. Thus the victory of one group was accepted by the defeated enemies as a challenge to display their power. To be honoured by the living and the dead, a wounded warrior would not surrender until he had taken revenge.55 Their acts of bravery made them warriors and heroes in the eyes of their people. Should the warrior fail to take revenge, and be slain in the battle, the honour fell on his blood-brother(s) to strike back. The Sentanians have

55 Ibid., 37.
a saying that explains the responsibility the brothers have for each other, 'No one will ever go out searching for your footprints, but your left-over blood'.

Jesus appeared in the midst of the ancestors as an Ancestor (Heb 1:1) in search of the footprints of the first ancestor, Adam, the progenitor of the human race, in order to avenge the enemy who had brought His, and His descendants', death. Jesus has captured the head of the enemy, and has publicly declared His victory over him on behalf of His people (Col 2:15; Heb 2:14,15).

Hebrews presents the death of Jesus in the context of cosmic warfare, with humanity on one side (2:6-8) and the forces of evil on the other (2:14-15). The battle has been fought and Jesus has been crowned with glory and honour (Heb 2:9). The details of the battle will now be considered.

6:3:3:1 Jesus Fought for Humanity

Jesus entered the battle as a true human being, one who 'was made a little lower than the angels' (Heb 2:8), the position occupied by humanity (Heb 2:7). At creation, God subjected the entire creation to human beings to rule over and to care for it (Gen 1:27-8; 2:15). The first pair, Adam and Eve, the original human ancestors, disobeyed God and lost the battle (Gen 3:1-24). Jesus came searching for the footprints of His blood-brother or blood-sister who had sinned against God. Adam and Eve were clearly wrong and had to face the consequences. And since they were incapable of fighting against and defeating the cosmic enemy, Jesus came to wage war against the enemy who had defeated them. And so the Sentanian proverb, 'No one will go searching for your footprints, but your “left-over blood” ', refers to one who shares your blood with you. Jesus, who shared human blood with all human beings (Is 7:14; 9:6; Lk 1:31; Jn 1:14; Rom 8:3; Phil 2:7; Gal 4:4-5; Heb 2:14; 1 Jn 4:2), entered the battle as humanity's supreme Ancestor-Warrior, 'the Pioneer of their salvation' (Heb 2:10). The title 'Pioneer' denotes among other things, a trailblazer, a war leader and warrior. Leon Morris most fittingly sums up,

The word (Pioneer) contains the thoughts of supremacy, personal participation, and originating something. Any one of these may be prominent. Here it is surely the thought of origination that is stressed, but the choice of the word enables the author to see Jesus as One who trod this earthy way before us as He established the way of salvation.

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56 'Left-over blood', Sentanian expression for younger sibling, in this case a younger brother.

In line with our discussion, we should retain all three words – supremacy, personal relationship, and originating – for they aptly represent the person and work of Jesus. Jesus is the supreme Ancestor-Warrior, the Commander-in-Chief, who single-handedly (personally) combatted and conquered the enemy. The battle He won is for the salvation of the whole world. Jesus is the originator, or the Pioneer, of human salvation. The designation Pioneer denotes the fact that no one ever fought this battle before, no one else ever established the way of salvation Jesus had procured by His life.

Jesus secured salvation for all humanity by the will of God, the Supreme Being, the Father above, ‘so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone’ (Heb 2:9). As the conquering Ancestor-Warrior in cosmic spiritual conflict, Jesus had opened up and sealed a new and living royal highway into the Father’s house with His own blood;

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, His body, and since we have a great Priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water (Heb 10:19-22).

Brothers belong to the same house, they are members of the same family, born of the same father, possessing the same family characteristics, living under the same kose, and in this case, living under the kose of Jesus. Hebrews brings humanity into the kose of Jesus, ‘both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers’ (Heb 2:11). This is a new truth for Melanesians. Jesus became a blood-brother of human beings so that He could originate and give birth to a fresh, new community – the community of holy brothers and sisters. This is a new restrictive community, as Morris points out, ‘It is not people, as such, He calls brothers but only those who are sanctified’.58

Jesus therefore challenges Melanesians to enter into a personal relationship with God the Supreme Being as their Father by personally experiencing the sanctifying work of Jesus in their lives. Neither Melanesians, nor any other racial group, is capable of producing this quality of life for itself; for, as Hitchen says,

The Christian way of salvation does not rest on man [sic] deciding to reform his ways. If it did then John the Baptist had done all that was necessary, and there

58 Ibid., 28.
was no need for Christ to step into human affairs. But the demands of the holiness and justice of God, and the resultant moral nature of the universe required a way of salvation which satisfied the legal implications of man’s [sic] rebellion against his Maker. 59

Jesus as the Ancestor-Warrior has come into the battle-field of the human world to fight for His brothers. The enemy has been defeated. He has been crowned once-and-for-all with glory and honour. He has opened a pathway to God’s house with His body for all the people to come to God. But, who was this enemy that Jesus defeated?

6:3:3:2 Jesus Fought against Satan and the Forces He Controlled

So far we have looked at the battle from the side of humanity. We turn now to look at the battle from the perspective of the forces against which Jesus fought (Heb 2:14-15). Jesus became a human being in order to fight the arch-enemy of all people, Satan or the Devil, who controlled death, and made the people live in life-long bondage to the fear of death. The Melanesian concept of community is a cosmic community, a holistic community of humans, non-human entities, and spirits. The battle Jesus fought, therefore, is a cosmic battle, not simply to defeat the enemy, but in doing so to bring the entire cosmic world back into its proper relationship with its maker. Melanesians were ignorant of the battle that had been fought and won on their behalf. They did not know that there was a being called Satan who had been deceiving them throughout their lives. Their ancestors did not have this knowledge, although there were many glimmerings of this in beliefs about malevolent spirits. It was Christianity that brought this news some 1,850 years after the battle was fought and won on their behalf. This is very crucial new information about the battle between Jesus and the Devil, which has to be built into Melanesian ancestral heritage as part of that heritage. Jesus, the eponymous Ancestor of the Melanesians has conquered the Devil in order to establish a new Melanesian community. This is close to being the central pillar of the Christian faith, the foundation for its inclusion in the national constitution of Papua New Guinea. It has every right to stand alongside the ancestral pillar. It is up to the nation of Papua New Guinea to decide whether the two pillars should stand side-by-side. We will return to this issue later. 60 Right now, we turn to look at Satan and his ways.

60 Discussed as part of point 6:3:4:1 on page 212.
The Bible uses a range of names to describe Satan. He is called the prince of this world (Jn 12:31); the god of this age (2 Cor 4:4); the deceiver and liar (Gen 3:1; Rev 12:9); the prince of demons (Mt 12:24); the evil one (Mt 5:37; 6:13; 13:19; Jn 17:15); Belial, the worthless one (Dt 13:13; 2 Cor 6:15).

Satan uses clever tricks to pull people away from God. Satan’s devices include: the doctrine of demons, human traditions, teaching about elemental spirits of the universe (1 Tim 4:1-2; Col 2:8); false teachers (2 Cor 11:3-5, 13-15); temptations of many kinds (Mt 4:8-10); human rituals both good and bad. As prince of this world, Satan uses many tactics to make himself and his power known to the people. In summarizing Satan’s activities, Hitchen says,

He disguises his real plan with clever words and actions. This is how he has been able to control so many people for many generations . . . It is his nature to hide and oppose truth, honesty, and justice. He is always looking for ways to twist and change the truth. He is the greatest of deceivers.\(^6^1\)

As the angel of light, Satan can quote the Bible to suit his purposes. Since the fall of the first human ancestors, Satan has been controlling human attitudes and thought patterns. The Bible warns us against practices that oppose God, and His love and care for us. In relation to Satanic influence in the New Testament, Morris writes, ‘Everywhere the New Testament sees a great conflict between the forces of God and of good on the one hand, and those of evil led by Satan on the other. This is not the conception of one writer or another, but is common ground.’\(^6^2\)

The Bible therefore contains information to help us understand what God thinks about some of the cultural practices that are Satanic, and, therefore, are destructive for practitioners and other people. God will judge those who practise sorcery, magic, astrology, and other evil practices associated with them (Is 47:8-13; Acts 8:9-11). Divination or sorcery is forbidden in the Bible (Lev 19:26), and sorcerers are to be put to death (Ex 22:18). The wearing of charms, and using them to kill people, makes God angry (Ezk 13:18; 20-21). Child-sacrifice, interpreting omens, witchcraft, mediums, consulting the dead are all forbidden (Dt 18:9-13). God warned His people not to associate themselves with mediums or necromancers, nor follow their practices (Dt 18:10-12; 1 Sam 28:7; Lev 19:31; 20:6-7).


These selected passages contain warnings from God for people today as strong as they did for God’s people in the past. God told Israel not to follow these practices, not simply to preserve its ethnic identity as Mantovani claims, but because Israel had a missionary mandate to fulfil; for Israel was chosen to be God’s light to the other nations (Is 60:3). Nations and rulers of the world were to come to Israel to learn God’s word, to worship Him, and to be directed by Him (Is 2:1-5). God’s people were not to copy the practices of the nations surrounding the promised land, so that they would not fall into Satan’s devices to trap and to turn them away from God. The prophet Isaiah clearly portrayed Israel as the servant of Yahweh, to make Him known to the world through suffering and rejection, not by following the practices of the surrounding nations and becoming one with them. Israel’s position to be the light to the nations is clearly stated, and is extended to the church by our Lord, ‘let Your light shine before men, that they may see Your good deeds and praise Your Father in heaven’ (Mt 5:16).

Melanesians have practised witchcraft, magic, and sorcery for countless years for evil purposes. The missionary task is to clearly teach God’s word concerning these matters in the light of Jesus’ victory, so that the people can decide the way they are to follow. We must now return to consider Jesus’ victory over the cosmic powers stated in Hebrews 2:14-15.

6:3:3 The Victory of Jesus over Cosmic Powers

On page 189 we referred to compensation or retribution as the heart of the Christian message. This point will now be discussed in relation to the victory of Jesus. In Hebrews 2:14-15 the death of Jesus is expressed as revenge or payback. For Melanesians, this act by Jesus is a clear example of compensation or retribution He carried out on behalf of humanity. The cosmic powers through Satan had imprisoned human beings throughout all their lives. Hebrews 2:14-15, like Colossians 2:15, expresses the ultimate triumph of Jesus over Satan and his forces. As their great Ancestor-Warrior Jesus became a human being in order to deliver human beings from Satan’s strong grip. Jesus did this by taking revenge against the cosmic powers on behalf of humanity through the miracles He performed. The miracles of Jesus represent the power of God robbing Satan of his household, ‘But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you ... how can anyone enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house’ (Mt 12:28-29). If the miracles of Jesus represent the tying
up of the strong man, then the death of Jesus spells Satan's total defeat. 'The cross marked a cosmic triumph in which all principalities and powers were disarmed, the works of the devil destroyed, and the world conquered (Jn 16:33; Col 2:15; 1 Jn 3:8).''

The death of Jesus is the climax of the demolition of the power of Satan the strong man, together with the power and the fear of death.\(^\text{64}\) Death disarmed of its power means deliverance from the power of sin which controls death, and the power of the law which controls sin. Jesus conquered the cosmic powers by defeating the powers of Satan, death, sin, and the law. By way of summary, the apostle Paul states, 'The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Cor 15:56-7).

As the Ancestor-Warrior, Jesus fought against cosmic powers on behalf of humanity. The defeat of the cosmic forces has made human beings holy. Those who have been made holy constitute a new family of God. Jesus challenges Melanesians to accept Him as their Ancestor-Warrior sufficient for all their needs.

6:3:3:4 Jesus: Guardian of the Community

Melanesian communities are named after their founding ancestors, who are considered as guardians of their people.\(^\text{65}\) Jesus, as the ancestor of humanity, is associated with the descendants of Abraham (Heb 2:16). The descendants of Abraham are the same people referred to as 'heirs of what was promised' (Heb 6:17). In chapter 5 of this thesis we pointed out that in identifying Jesus with Melchizedek and Abraham, Hebrews made Jesus responsible for the priesthood and the descendants they represented. However, because Abraham points to a dying priesthood of ancient Israel's future, Melchizedek, who had become Abraham's country-man, and as one whose Priesthood is a living one, took responsibility for Abraham's priesthood and descendants. The descendants of Abraham mentioned in Hebrews 2:16 therefore are the descendants of Melchizedek.

Since Jesus has taken over the Melchizedekian Priesthood, the descendants of Melchizedek become the descendants of Jesus. In other words, the cosmic war Jesus fought, and the victory He won through His death, were for the benefit of His descendants. This is indeed the case, because Hebrews 2:14 reads, 'Since the children


\(^{64}\) For discussion on Melanesian attitudes towards death, see Trompf, 'Man Facing Death and After-life in Melanesia', in Habel (ed.), Powers, 121-36, also his Melanesian Religion, chapter 2.

\(^{65}\) See discussion about Sentanian tribes in chapter 4 of this thesis pages 109-112.
have flesh and blood, He, too, shared in their humanity’. The descendants of Jesus as discussed above are those whom He has made holy (Heb 2:10), those He is not ashamed to call brothers. Jesus became one with humanity ‘in order that He might become a merciful and faithful High Priest in service to God, and that He might make atonement for the sins of the people’ (Heb 2:17). Jesus made atonement or restitution with His own life when He defeated the cosmic powers. As the merciful and faithful High Priest, Jesus guards and keeps each one of His descent group safe and secure. ‘Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help (lit. to run to the cry of) those who are being tempted’ (Heb 2:18). In Jesus, God’s promise to Abraham finds its true universal fulfilment, as Kistemaker has put it, for

the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews makes the divine blessing applicable to all believers by calling them heirs of the promise. That means that God’s blessing to Abraham transcends the centuries, and is in Christ as relevant today as it was in Abraham’s time (Gal 3:7,9,29). The oath God swore to Abraham was meant for us, to strengthen us in our faith.\textsuperscript{65}

As their merciful and faithful High Priest, Jesus guards and protects His descendants through His intercessory ministry (Heb 7:25). The High-Priestly ministry of Jesus is a follow-up ministry flowing out of His atoning sacrificial death. The sacrifice Jesus made 2,000 years ago would be meaningless without His High-Priestly follow-up ministry. God, the Father has placed Him at His right hand as High Priest (Heb 8:1) in order to attend to the needs of His descendants over all time.

The victory of Jesus over Satan and his forces is presented in Colossians 2:15 as a public spectacle for all to see. A public display of victory, as we saw earlier, is an open invitation to the enemy to strike back whenever he can. Jesus has completely defeated Satan, sin, and death, yet their presence and influence are keenly felt everywhere today. Through His death and Priestly ministry Jesus challenges Melanesians to place themselves under His guardianship as their victorious Ancestor-Warrior throughout their journey in life. This is all the more important because Jesus is more than a human being.

\textbf{6:3:4 The Uniqueness of Jesus}

So far, we have concentrated on Jesus in relation to the Melanesian ancestors. We have shown some of the areas where Christianity and Melanesian ancestral heritage can

\textsuperscript{65} Hebrews, 174.
cooperate and complement each other. We have also looked at areas where Christianity challenges Melanesian ancestral heritage with the claims of Jesus upon the lives of Melanesians. There are certain aspects of the life and ministry of Jesus which are true of Him and no one else. Jesus is God incarnated in a human body in order to accomplish God’s eternal will for humanity. The following discussion focuses on the uniqueness of Jesus and His ministry, punctuated in the Epistle to the Hebrews by the phrase ‘once-for-all.’

6:3:4:1 Jesus is God and Human
On page 207 we raised the question whether Melanesian ancestral heritage and Christianity can stand side-by-side. This point will now be discussed from the point of view of Christianity in relation to the person and work of Jesus Christ, who is the centre of the Christian faith. The discussion provided here is aimed at helping Papua New Guineans to see the importance of Jesus Christ for their individual lives, and the lives of their communities. It is our hope that when we reach the end of this chapter Papua New Guineans will be able to see more clearly how the two pillars relate to each other.

Hebrews introduces us to Jesus as the Son of God (Heb 1:2). He is further identified as God’s first-born (Heb 1:6) whom God has entroned as God and King (1:8). God calls Jesus ‘My Son’ a designation reserved for Him and no one else, ‘For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are My Son; today I have become Your Father?”’ (Heb 1:5). Although Jesus has always been God’s Son (1:2; 5:8), the word ‘today’ represents a new beginning in His relationship with the Father. When then did this new relationship start? The statement, ‘You are My Son; today I have become Your Father’ is repeated in Hebrews 5:5 in conjunction with the Father installing the Son as High Priest in the order of Melchizedek. Jesus, who has always been God’s Son from eternity, became God’s Son in a new way on the same day He became a High Priest. According to Hebrews 5:9-10, Jesus was made High Priest in the order of Melchizedek after He was made perfect through suffering. This points to His resurrection, the day when He rose victoriously from the grave, after overcoming all the forces, the accomplishment of which made Him perfect. Thus the word ‘today’ in Hebrews 1:5 is stated retrospectively with the view to Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus has risen! He has fully accomplished the Father’s will (Heb 10:7). In honour and in recognition of His perfect achievement, the Father joyfully welcomes Him and makes Him His Son the second time. The implication is that Jesus would not have achieved this Son-ship recognition
had He failed in His redemptive mission for the whole world. Jesus is the Son of God
twice over, both by right of eternal existence and achievement. More than this, He has
been enthroned as God and King twice after His resurrection. All the attributes that are
part of God’s character, everything which makes God to be God, are true also of Jesus
Christ.

6:3:4:2 The ‘Once-For-All’ Designations of Jesus
Melanesians trust their ancestors because of who they were and what they achieved for
their communities. Although they are dead, the memory of their lives and deeds remain
with the people. They are remembered, because in the world of the dead, they continue
to hold their positions and functions. They were warriors, orators, mighty hunters, and
gardeners, the koseros and ondoporos. As such, they continued to hold on to their status
and positions in the world of the dead. What they achieved became the heritage, the
history, the joy and pride of their communities.

Jesus as the great Ancestor-Warrior achieved great things for His community or
descendants. What Jesus achieved has become the living heritage, the strength and hope
of the community. Far from being dead, deeds belong to the world of memories, and
besides, Jesus still works to achieve these deeds in the life of His descendants. We will
now discuss the ‘once-for-all’ achievements of Jesus, as indicated above, in relation to
sin, the end of the ages, eternal redemption, and holiness.

6:3:4:2:1 Jesus is the Priest and the Victim
‘Unlike the other high priests, He does not need to offer sacrifices day-after-day, first
for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once-
for-all when He offered Himself’ (Heb 7:27).

The fact of human sin is a big issue. Human beings, including the ancestors, are
sinful. Their sin affects their relationship with each other and with God. In the Old
Testament, the high priest had to offer animal sacrifices year after year for his own sins
and the sins of the people, because no animal sacrifice could permanently remove the
effect of sin on human life and the community in which they lived. The effect of sin on
the life of the community was such that it necessitated the high priest to offer daily
sacrifices for sins committed unintentionally by him or the people, as instructed in
Leviticus 4.
Unlike the Levitical high priest, Jesus had no sin of His own for which He had to offer animal sacrifice. The sacrifice He offered is a blameless, pure sacrifice of Himself: He, the perfect Priest, the perfect sacrificial victim. The sacrifice He offered is a ‘once-for-all’ sacrifice. God has accepted His sacrifice by appointing Him to be the High Priest in the order of Melchizedek. Although He became one with humanity and shared their many limitations, He lived a sinless life throughout His earthly sojourning. Jesus is the perfect High Priest who understands our weaknesses and comes to our aid, so far above us and so near to us; Himself in need of no cleansing, and able to cleanse and expiate all our guilt; so different from the Levitical priests and so much more effective in the function of His sacerdotal mediation.\textsuperscript{67}

The ‘once-for-all’ for the sacrifice of Jesus is powerful and effective for all eternity. All Melanesian priests and ancestors, like those of the Old Testament, cannot match the exemplary character of Jesus. Melanesian ancestors are honoured for their heroic endeavour and achievements. They fearlessly defended their communities, denying sleep, braving the enemy, capturing prized heads. Of all human victories, however glorious, none is comparable to the solitary triumph of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth. So Hughes writes,

in temptation He knew no defeat, in suffering He endured to the end, and in death He was sovereign, proving by the glory of His resurrection that He had power both to lay down His life and to take it up again (Jn 10:18).\textsuperscript{68}

6:3:4:2:2 Jesus is the End and the Beginning

‘But now He has appeared once-for-all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself’ (Heb 9:26).

The phrase, ‘But now He has appeared’ signifies the fact that Jesus existed before He appeared. What is implied here is made explicit in the fourth Gospel,

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and the only [Son], who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (Jn 1:1-2,14).

In chapter three of this thesis we discussed the fact that time carries personal significance for Melanesians. Melanesians determined time by the position of the planets and their relationship to their ancestors. The position of the moon or the

\textsuperscript{67} Hughes, Hebrews, 280.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 279.
appearance of the morning star told the people what they could or could not do. The ancestral-time marked the beginning of good things, the abundance of food and animals. These time markers are important because they have direct relationship to the people. Time for Melanesians is a salvific concept. Melanesians look to their ancestors for salvation or abundance of life in terms of health, wealth, big families, productive gardens, jungles full of game, and water teeming with life. Melanesians believe that things are not as they used to be in the earlier days of their ancestors. This may be due to sin in the life of the community, or due to failure on the part of the ancestors in not passing on the secret to the community. The community believes that one day the ancestors will return with this secret of abundant life, about which John Strelan writes, 'Fateful decisions and actions, which were taken in the past, will somehow be reversed and man [sic] will regain his true identity, his dignity and integrity as a human being.'

The statement 'but He has appeared' speaks about the coming of Jesus into the world as a human being. This period of time is then spoken of as 'the end of the ages.' This means the coming of Jesus into the world in His incarnation marks the end of the ages. In Jesus, all the expectations and the promises of the Old Testament find their complete fulfilment.

All that preceded the advent of Christ was leading up to this climactic event which is the focal point for the true perspective of all human history. With His coming the long years of desire and expectation are ended and the last, the eschatological era, of the present world is inaugurated (1:1-2).

The way Hebrews understands the timing of Jesus' coming is the same as Paul's understanding of it as stated in Galatians 4:4 which we discussed in chapter 3. Thus 'the end of the ages' has the same meaning as 'when the time has fully come' in Galatians 4:4.

The purpose of the coming of Jesus 'at the end of the ages' is 'to do away with sin'. In Paul's thinking, it is 'to redeem those under law' (Gal 4:5). Sin and law are partners. Sin gives strength to the law, and the law exposes sin. Thus the coming of Jesus, expressed in terms of time, carries significant personal meaning for Melanesians as it does for all other human beings. Sin clings tightly to human life. Sin for Melanesians consists of breaking the ancestral Lo which governs the community.

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solidarity and harmony. The application of the ancestral *Lo* to what is specifically called sin differs from place to place, because sin is culturally defined or understood—as Wayne Dye has ably argued.\textsuperscript{72} At the same time, the New Testament raises deeper issues concerning sin. Sin affects the inmost being of human life, the conscience, which can only be set right by the unblemished sacrifice of Jesus (Heb 9:14). In Paul's understanding, sin imprisons and cripples human beings so that they become slaves to sin (Rom 7:21-25). But sin cannot have the final word in human lives, because, in Christ, Paul discovered God's answer for sin's enslavement, 'Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!' (Rom 7:25). However sin is understood, the one thing sin does is to destroy and kill, because, as we have seen, Satan uses sin to destroy human beings. Jesus appeared at God's appointed time 'to do away with sin', which in Greek, according to Leon Morris, is a very strong expression

signifying the total annulment of sin. Sin then is rendered completely inoperative and this was done 'by the sacrifice of Himself'. It is the self-offering of Christ that is the decisive thing. For the author, this is the truth that must be grasped.\textsuperscript{73}

\textbf{6:3:4:2:3 Jesus Saves and Sanctifies}

'And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once-for-all' (Heb 10:10).

On page 190 we spoke about being born into the family of Jesus, or the family of God. The way into this family relationship, and what it entails, will now be taken up in this section. It was the will of God that Jesus should die to put away sin from the face of the earth, and in so doing open the door for humanity to become members of the family of God. The will of God includes humanity being made holy through the death of Jesus once-for-all. Jesus died by offering His body once-for-all as a unique sacrifice for human salvation and sanctification. Morris has pointed out that 'being made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ', speaks about becoming a Christian rather than growing 'progressively in Christian qualities and character'.\textsuperscript{74} To be a Christian\textsuperscript{75} is to be a member of the family of God once-for-all. This is the believer's ground for eternal confidence and security.

\textsuperscript{73} Morris, 'Hebrews', 93.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 99.
\textsuperscript{75} It needs to be pointed out that such phrases as 'becoming Christian', or 'to be a Christian' are not used in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Nevertheless, such statements like 'salvation', 'perfect', 'made holy', (Heb 2:10,11) speak about the process of becoming Christian.
To be made holy carries with it the idea of being set apart or separated, belonging to God forever. The idea of being set apart is linked with the thought of the heavenly calling mentioned in Hebrews 3:1, ‘Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest whom we confess.’ The phrase ‘the heavenly calling’ covers such concepts as: separation, fulfilled life in heaven, a life of dignity bestowed on the believers by God, a rich spiritual experience, a vocation with spiritual rather than material direction in close identification with God. The calling originates with God, it does not come from one human being to another, or from within the individual. The calling of God is made available to humanity by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus. The calling becomes a reality to the people as they enter into a relationship with God through a faith-confession in Jesus Christ. Accordingly, the ‘holy brothers’ are admonished with the words ‘fix your thoughts on Jesus the Apostle and High Priest whom we confess’ (Heb 3:1). The designation ‘Apostle’ with reference to Jesus, occurs only here in the New Testament, with mission being its primary meaning. As the High Priest of His people, Jesus offered His body in sacrifice for them. As the sacrificial victim, Jesus provided His body to purify or make holy those who believe in Him. No other creature, angel or human, could have achieved what Jesus accomplished for humanity. As the enthroned representative of His people He continues to attend to the needs of God’s children or family.

6:3:4:2:4 Jesus Purifies and Preserves

‘He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but entered the Most Holy Place once-for-all by His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption’ (Heb 9:12).

Having fulfilled the will of God once-for-all by offering His body as a sacrifice to make the people holy, Jesus ascended to heaven. The Father had welcomed and crowned Him as God and King (1:8), and appointed Him High Priest in the order of Melchizedek (5:6,10; 6:20; 7:17). The death He died is the basis for His enthronement

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77 Bruce, *Hebrews*, 55.
and His heavenly ministry. Jesus has entered heaven, the Most Holy Place, by means of His own blood.

Jesus is in heaven on the basis of the redemptive work He accomplished on earth, 'having obtained eternal redemption.' The blood of animals, and the high priests who offered the sacrifices for their own sins and the sins of the people, could not achieve what Jesus has accomplished. The sacrifice Jesus offered of Himself is a once-for-all sacrifice in the place of continuous animal sacrifices offered year after year. Hebrews has animal sacrifices in mind when it states 'Sacrifices and offerings You did not desire, but a body You prepared for Me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings You were not pleased. Then I said, “Here I am – it is written about Me in the scroll – I have come to do Your will O God”;' (Heb 10:5-7). Jesus took the place of animal sacrifices for the sins of the people. This being the case, we can say that Jesus died for the ‘salvation’ of innocent animals, and according to Paul, the whole creation is included in the redemptive work of Christ (Rom 8:18-25). The whole creation waits with eager expectation for its final redemption when the enthroned Son of God will roll up the earth and the heavens ‘like a robe, like a garment they will be changed’ (Heb 1:10-12).

Jesus died for the entire universe, He who created the universe died to redeem His creation. Jesus has accomplished eternal redemption by one sacrifice, ‘But when this Priest had offered one sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God’ (Heb 10:14). The Old Testament priests stood up when they offered redemptive acts year after year, for theirs was an incomplete and an imperfect task. But the sacrifice of Jesus is complete and perfect once-for-all. He is sitting down in heaven for He, the perfect High Priest has offered a perfect sacrifice. He had opened ‘a new and living way’ (Heb 10:20) for His people to enter the Most Holy Place without fear or hindrance,

From the shame of the cross He has been exalted to the place of highest glory. With more confidence, therefore, may His people avail themselves of His High-Priestly aid, assured that in Him they have access to all the grace and power of God.81

Access into the presence of God under the old dispensation was limited to the high priest annually. Under the new dispensation, all the people, but especially Christians, have equal access into the Most Holy Place through the blood of Jesus on a continual and unlimited basis ‘because by one sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are

81 Bruce, Hebrews, 239.
being made holy' (Heb 10:14). Jesus has been enthroned once-for-all in the Most Holy Place to pray for His people and to provide for their needs; ‘because He always lives to intercede for them’ (Heb 7:25), and personally provide for their growth and development, as Morris states in relation to Hebrews 10:14,

the perfecting of the saints came by one offering, and by one alone. The writer does not say that Christ’s sacrifice perfects the people, but that Christ does this. His salvation is essentially personal. . . . The process of salvation takes people who are far from perfect and makes them fit to be in God’s presence forever. It is not temporary improvement He is speaking of but improvement that is never ending. 82

Thus the ‘once-for-all’ achievements of Jesus speak of what Jesus alone did through the sacrifice of His body for the salvation of His people to meet their needs on a personal basis day after day. In offering His body for their salvation, He thereby guarantees their perfection and preservation in their journey to heaven.

6:4 CHRISTIANITY PROVIDES CULTURAL ADAPTATION

As a way of life centred in Jesus Christ, the Gospel answers the longings of the religions of the world, including Melanesian traditional religion. The primary goal of the Gospel is the transformation of human lives through faith in the finished work of Jesus of Nazareth. For all its sufficiency and superiority, Christianity appears like a beggar evermore searching for food, drink, cover and shelter ‘from cultures and times it encounters in its never ending journeys and wanderings.’ 83 Instead of rubbishing culture, Christianity challenges the demonic, sanctifies and enriches the wholesome and the enduring elements in every culture, and uses them as vehicles for the propagation of the Gospel and the maturing of the faith of Christians. There exists, therefore, a close affinity between Christianity and human cultures. It is possible therefore for Christianity and Melanesian culture to talk with each other. For the Christian faith and message to take deep root in the Melanesian culture we must take advantage of the existing culture. The need for Melanesianizing or contextualizing Christianity in Melanesia is the urgent need of the hour. This part of the discussion concentrates on further attempts which have been made to adapt Christianity to Melanesian culture. This will be done in two parts as follows:

82 ‘Hebrews’, 101.
Christianity and Melanesian Ancestral Heritage and the Ancestors

Christianity and Worship in Melanesia

6:4:1 Christianity and Melanesian Ancestral Heritage and the Ancestors

Melanesian ancestral heritage prepared the way for the coming of the Christian message brought by the missionaries. The coming together of Melanesian ancestral heritage and the Christian faith is like a man and woman meeting together in marriage. Marriage, Biblically understood, is a life-long union to be dissolved only by death. Good marriage calls for good preparation, and for mutual readiness to give and take, to retain the useful and to reject the harmful.

Melanesians owe it to their ancestors for preparing the way for this marriage by pointing the communities in Melanesia to the existence of a Supreme Being, identified in different places as: Asisi, Anutu, Yakili, Ogla Nuknuk, Iballi, Datagaliwabe, Manarmakeri, and so on. Melanesians considered the Supreme Being as the origin of their lives, and of the holistic community to which they belong. As the origin of the Melanesian cosmos, the Supreme Being was once part of this life but most often departed to distant places. The people called on him or her when it was really necessary.

In this thesis we have pointed out that Jesus came to make this Supreme Being known to the Melanesians. It is important, therefore, that Jesus is adopted into the Melanesian ancestral heritage by giving Him a place that will make Him meaningful to Melanesians. We did this in the earlier part of this chapter by relating Jesus meaningfully to Melanesians from the Epistle of Hebrews. We will now look at some more possible ways for adapting the Gospel meaningfully to Melanesian culture.

Mantovani has used theistic and biocosmic concepts of religion to make Jesus meaningful for the Melanesians. A theistic religion is a God-centred religion based on the Greek word theos meaning God. A theistic religion explains everything in terms of a personal God on whom human beings depend for all their need. A biocosmic religion sees religion in terms of life based on two Greek words, bio meaning life, and cosmic or cosmos meaning 'the world' including the earth. The biocosmic life is based on a dema, a being (mother-, daughter-, or son-figure) who is both human and more than human, who is killed violently, buried, and comes to life out of the grave in the form of staple
food previously unknown to the people. Mantovani links the dema story with Jesus, who died to give life to the world.84

In another paradigm, Gibbs has related Jesus to the Enga people using Enga words like Kamongo, Akali andake Jisasa, Yangoe Jisasa and Pakae Jisasa.85 Kamongo is the Enga term for a Big Man.

The Enga Big Man is one influential in pig exchange, a skilled orator and negotiator. He is a man with a name (important), a man with talk (convincing), or a large man (powerful). Christ was not a Big Man in the human sense, but there are admired qualities in the meaning of the term which could be used to be an innovation to the cultural meaning. If God/Christ is kamongo then Christ is important, Christ speaks convincingly, Christ is powerful.86

The other Enga terms are Akili andake Jisasa (Big Man Jesus), Yangoe Jisasa (Brother Jesus [from a male perspective]), and Pakae Jisasa (Beloved brother Jesus [from a woman’s viewpoint]).87

In ‘Indigenization as Incarnation – the Concept of a Melanesian Christ’, Gaqurae, as we have noted, develops another approach, pointing out that Melanesians should see Jesus as a Melanesian. Born as a Jew, Jesus is the ideal man, a true representative of humanity, thus ... a Melanesian.88

Richard Lively has used the Melanesian concept of payback in relation to Jesus as a model of discipleship. The logic of retribution is at the heart of Melanesian ancestral heritage. Thus, as Trompf writes,

Behind the Melanesian pidgin term bekim (payback) lies the presumption that life, punctuated by dangerous feuding and competitions, coloured by the excitement of reciprocities and trade, is to be apprehended as a continuous interweaving of gains and losses, giving and taking, wealth and destitution, joy and sorrow, vitality and death. How Melanesians think about the significant events and situations affecting them, and how their thinking is translated into action, are points of inquiry covered by my phrase ‘the logic of retribution’.89

The concern of Lively’s discussion is that Christians in the Melanesian context apply this system of reciprocity to their relationship with God or Jesus. Having been

86 Ibid., 29, 30.
87 Ibid., 30.
Christians for years, some Melanesians feel they have fulfilled their obligation to God, so they do not have to be Christians anymore. Lively suggests that the logic of retribution is a useful way of contextualizing the process of discipleship by showing the Christians that since God gave His life in death for them, the Christians in return have to give God their lives for as long as they live.  

Garry Roche has proposed that the Moka trading system, a complex reciprocity system, involving all parts of the Enga culture, with its binding obligations between Moka partners, is a meaningful cultural concept to explain God’s relationship with the people, since a Moka, or a covenant bond, requires both partners to maintain their obligations faithfully to each other.

Christianity has something very vital to offer to Melanesians. Jesus Christ, the central pillar of the Christian message, needs to be presented in relevant cultural terms to the people, as shown in the above examples, and throughout this thesis.

Because Melanesia is a region with a multiplicity of diverse cultures, the contextualization of the Gospel will differ from place to place. Whilst this task is very important, the need for regionally-acceptable concepts to be used to explain the relevance of Jesus across the south-west Pacific should not be ignored. The concept of ancestor, which fits so well into a theistic or biocosmic understanding of the Gospel, is one of the many rich treasures of the Melanesian ancestral heritage for the contextualization of the Christian message, and it is the model of Jesus as a Great Ancestor that would be the most widely-applicable and all-encompassing for the Melanesian situation. This is the contextualization model expanded in this thesis.

Melanesian ancestors have done the Melanesian communities a great service by providing them with a rich ancestral heritage as a useful bridge to cross from the known to the unknown, from the old to the new. The work the Melanesian ancestors did is like that of John the Baptist who prepared the way for the coming of Jesus. To those who wanted to know his credentials John the Baptist said, ‘I am the voice of one calling in the desert, “Make straight the way of the Lord”’ (Jn 1:24). When John’s own disciples reported to him that many people were going to Jesus to be baptized, John replied:

A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of Him. The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and

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listens for Him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine and is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less (Jn 3:27-30).

Jesus has come to make the Supreme Being, Melanesians were conscious of, known to them. As pointers of the way, Melanesian ancestors, like John the Baptist, have completed their work. The faithful ancestors, who through faith in Jesus have found acceptance with God, and are in the heavenly Jerusalem as part of the great cloud of witnesses (Heb 12:1). They have entered into the joyful gathering of the Most Holy Place, sealed and cared for by their Ondoporo-Ancestor, Jesus the Son of God. Through the finished work of Jesus, they are for evermore in heaven worshipping God together with believers from all over the world in the company of the angelic choir (Heb 12:22-24). With respect to the pre-Christian ancestors, their future rests entirely with God. Perhaps the Old Testament story of Abraham pleading with God on behalf of the righteous in Sodom and Gomorrah has something to contribute to the present concern, ‘Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?’ (Gen 18:25). If there were ten righteous people in Sodom and Gomorrah, God would not destroy the cities (Gen 18:32). The basis of their righteousness is not stated. Perhaps it was living according to the light of their conscience. If so, then for pre-Christian Melanesian ancestors, who had lived up to the best of their conscience, according to the cultural ‘light’ they had received, we can only hope that God, who is the Judge of all the earth will do that which is right by Him (Gen 18:25). It is also possible that, like Abraham, some of them might have been given faith like the faith of Abraham to believe in the Supreme Being, even though they did not know Him. God was indeed at work in Melanesia as He was at work everywhere else. If this is accepted, then those who had lived according to the light they had received might have had faith in the one true eternal God. The position expounded here is not easy to prove or disprove, because we are dealing with pre-Christian days. We must leave this issue with the Judge of the all the earth. However, the ancestors of the post-Christian period who have heard the message preached to them, but failed to appropriate the truth by faith in Jesus Christ, are in the place of torment and gnashing of teeth, as demonstrated by the story of the rich man and Lazarus the beggar (Lk 16:19-31). However harsh this may appear to be, the Biblical truth outlined in this passage cannot be ignored.

On page 194, we indicated that 96 percent of Melanesians have embraced Christianity as the religion of their lives. We can therefore say that a marriage between
Melanesian ancestral heritage and the Christian faith has been consummated on Melanesian soil. This marriage must continue to grow and bear fruit on Melanesian soil, find its meaning from Melanesian soil, and live out its marriage-life according to the mutual understanding of the partners in that marriage. The enduring success of the marriage requires ongoing open dialogue. Whilst open dialogue is the way forward, the superiority of the Christian faith over the Melanesian ancestral heritage needs to be the foundation to this dialogue. Jesus has taken over the position and the function of the ancestors. Melanesians are to look to Jesus alone for the success of the marriage they have entered into. As marriage is meant to be a life-time commitment of the partners, so faith commitment to Jesus has to be a life-time union also.

6:4:2 Christianity and Worship in Melanesia

Worship celebrations have been and continue to be the focal points of Melanesian community life. Traditionally, Melanesians held their worship celebrations in the village squares and dancing places, with the whole community taking part. Worship for Melanesians was the celebration of life.  

These worship celebrations were centred around the mythical and historical ancestors of the community. Mantovani said a fundamental difference exists between ‘mythical’ and ‘historical’ ancestors.

The mythical ancestor can be defined as the one who originated the historical time. The historical ancestor can be very important and famous, but he will always be the result of that mythical event brought about by the mythical ancestor. The mythical ancestor is not the creator but the ‘shaper’, that is, the one who shaped the creation into the present historical form. The historical ancestor can be only the channel through which the historical form came to the clans.

Melanesian celebrations were centred on the ancestors and their achievements. When the people of the Torricelli mountains of the Lumi area of the West Sepik of Papua New Guinea celebrated their Fish festival, they did so in relation to the past event which had become an important ancestral myth for the people. The following is a condensed version of the myth, told by Donald E. McGregor,

Long time ago, two women competed in an attempt to seduce a man into sexual relations. Refusing the advances, he ran away in much shame and, on jumping into a river, turned into a fish. The women followed in pursuit but were unable
to catch him. Swimming downstream he came to a large pool in a river where he stayed. One day a woman saw him. Admiring his beautiful skin, she attempted to catch him but the fish slipped out of her hands. Several months later the village held a festival. In those days festivals were quite ordinary events without elaborate decorations. At midnight a stranger appeared walking along the road to the village carrying a tall, profusely-decorated mask, complete with fish images woven into its structure. Carrying it on his head, he displayed its beauty as he danced around the village square. Everyone stopped their dancing and gazed in wonder at the majestic sight. Before long, they all joined in the dance. And so this stranger, none other than the fish who had become man again, showed them the mask, taught them the fish dance, its meaning and all that goes with it.

The festival symbolizes the people’s search for the origin, or the secret to health, wealth, power, prosperity, and all the deep longings of the people. The celebration was carried out by dancing with fish masks in honour of the mythical being, or their mythical ancestor, to whom they looked for the fullness of life.

When the Sentanians decorated themselves with the bird of paradise, beat their drums, and blew their conch-shells during their celebrations, they did so in honour of their mythical ancestors Mohowe, Taime, and others. The bird of paradise, the drum, and the conch-shell, as we saw in chapter 4, belong to the ondoporo. These articles are never used as tourist attractions. The Sentanians refer to them as warinet-tenanet etamoong (life-giving, eternal-giving possessions). These warinet-tenanei etamoong belong to the ondoporo, who is known as the warido-tenado (man of life, man of eternity, that is, giver of life, giver of eternity).

Whenever the Sentanians used the decorations, beat their drums, and blew the conch-shells in their celebrations they did so in honour of their mythical ancestors who are the source of life and eternity. Accordingly, what is used in honour of the ancestors, which is considered to be an awesome, holy, and sacred occasion, cannot be used for ordinary purposes.

The coming of Christianity and the new way of life have not taken away these time-honoured Sentanian festivities. The most-common musical instruments among the Sentanians at present are bamboo-flutes and Western or modern drums. In times of celebration, the people use these modern musical instruments, accompanied by the traditional ones. So the Sentanian celebrations were centred in their ancestors and were celebrated in honour of them as founding-fathers of their communities.

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McGregor, *The Fish and the Cross*, 21. The sudden appearance of the mythical fish as a human being could well signify the sudden appearance of the missionaries bringing the Gospel as the source and
In chapter 5 of this thesis, we pointed out that Jesus is the Sentanian Ondoporo Kabang, or the Ondoporo Bumanatere, the Chief or the Supreme Ondoporo. In recognizing Jesus as their Ondoporo Kabang, it will not be out of place to suggest that the Sentanians use the drums (both the traditional and modern), the conch-shell, and flutes in their Sunday worship to honour Jesus and His great victory for their salvation.

The Simbu Pig Festival is a celebration of life. The blood of pigs is sprinkled on kaukau (sweet potato) runners, digging-sticks, or spades to enable the gardens to produce an abundance of better and bigger kaukau. The ancestors, the living members of the community and the earth receive their share of life. The festival was celebrated with the blowing of flutes, dancing, and sharing of food. The blood of the pig, furthermore, represents cosmic renewal, the celebration of life centred in a dema-being whose death produced food crops, and animals to sustain life.\(^{95}\) The celebration makes them look back into the past in order to renew their faith so that they can move forward with confidence.

These Melanesian community celebrations were the peoples’ expression of worship to beings greater than themselves. The celebrations represent the people’s faith in their mythical ancestors, on whom they depended for their existence. The festivities were joyful occasions, celebrated with dancing, singing, flutes and drums. The entire community – children, youth, and adults, the sick and the healthy, the living and the dead, the visible and invisible – participated in these celebrations, expressing their solidarity with, and loyalty to, each other. Melanesians need to think carefully about blending the old and the new in their worship of God in their Sunday services.

It is important to remember that these celebrations were not daily, weekly or monthly celebrations, but occasions marked by ritual cycles, such as youth turning into adults, the death of important people, harvest and planting, and trading times.\(^{96}\) Whenever they were celebrated, and for whatever reason(s), these celebrations symbolize the richness of Melanesian spirituality. As such, they had to be celebrated according to the rules determined by the eponymous ancestor or spirit. Maeliau draws attention to this aspect of Melanesian religion,

In traditional religions it was commonly believed that the ways of worshipping any particular spirit had been given and sanctioned by the spirit concerned. So

foundation of community well-being.


\(^{96}\) Trompf, *Melanesian Religion*, 199.
the worshipping was careful about the correct procedures. Failure to do so rendered the worship ineffective, and could even bring punishment.97

Because traditional worship involved community well-being, they were led by elders who had been initiated into the ways of the ancestors. The community leaders had to make sure that everybody had the appropriate clan or tribal body and head decorations.

Whilst Christian worship does not have rules about the kind of clothing to be worn, the worship needs to be appropriately conducted. The God worshipped in heaven is worshipped on earth by His people. No one is more qualified than Jesus to lead God’s people in worship. The Epistle to the Hebrews places worship under the responsibility of the risen Christ. Having declared His one-blood solidarity with His sanctified brothers (Heb 2:11), ‘He says, “I will declare Your name to My brothers, in the presence of the congregation I will sing Your praises”’ (Heb 2:12). In order to worship God ‘in spirit and in truth’, as Jesus said to the woman of Samaria (Jn 4:24), Jesus leads God’s people in worship as the Head of the family, the one God has placed over His house (Heb3:6), as we have seen earlier. So, in the context of worship, He says, ‘I will put My trust in Him. . . . Here I am and the children God has given Me (Heb 2:13). As the High Priest and the spiritual head of the family, Jesus makes Himself present among His people to teach His children in matters of worship and trust in God.

The words in Hebrews 2:13 come from Isaiah 8:17-18. As Isaiah the prophet called on his disciples to trust in God, so Jesus is presented in Hebrews meeting with His children in worship to teach them the true art of worship and trust in God. Jesus is the leader and the teacher in worship.

‘Genuine worship’ says Richard Foster, ‘has only one Leader, Jesus Christ.’98 Christian worship grows out of the realization that God is in the midst of His people. Accordingly, as Arthur Gish elaborates,

Christian worship is God-centred. It is to acknowledge and affirm the supreme worth (worship) of God. Worship is more talking with God than about God. It is the conscious relationship of a community with God. Worship moves beyond the rational and the intellectual and speaks to the depth of our being.99

Christians are travellers from earth to heaven. Worship for them is a time for personal renewal and commitment to continue with the journey. ‘Worship, then, is not a gathering to dispense blessings, but a conversation of all the travellers with the Leader concerning deployment of people and checking of maps.’ In their conversation with the Leader, Christians affirm His supreme worth as Lord and God of their lives. When Christians worship they attribute to God His worth in response to His supreme majesty. Thus Ferdinand Hahn remarks, ‘His worthship calls for my worship.’ J. A. Kay says, ‘Worship is man’s [sic] response to the nature and action of God.’ As human beings ponder on the nature and the goodness of God, a sense of deep joy and thankfulness wells up from within human hearts turning worship into a time of celebration, ‘the celebration of God.’ Believers celebrate God when they, in the words of Allen and Borror,

Join together earnestly in prayer and intensely in song . . . boast in His name to the good of His people; give to Him hilariously, and serve Him with integrity . . . enjoy and participate in music to His glory . . . hear His Word gladly, and seek to be conformed by it more and more to the image of our Saviour . . . honour His Word with our words, by His Spirit . . . fellowship gratefully at the ceremonial meal that speaks so centrally to our faith in Christ Who died for us, Who rose again on our behalf, and Who is to return for our good. As a thoughtful gift is a celebration of a birthday, as a special evening out is a celebration of an anniversary, as a warm eulogy is a celebration of a life, as a sexual embrace is the celebration of marriage – so a worship service is a celebration of God.

Christian worship as a celebration of God requires the best from God’s people. Worship of God is joyful hard work. The statement by Allen and Borror may be too Western for the Melanesians, but the important worship ingredients they have presented are applicable to the Melanesian situation. Celebration has been part of Melanesian worship. Melanesians know about joyful and generous giving. The meal is an important part of Melanesian celebrations, communion meals can be celebrated with appropriate cultural elements, such as kula (mature green coconut for the coastal people), coconut water for the blood of Jesus, and strong coconut flesh for the body of

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100 Ibid., 248.
105 Ibid., 18-19.
Jesus. In the highlands, the body and blood of Jesus may be represented by cooked kaukau (sweet potato) and water.  

Melanesians know the importance of God’s Word for their lives and communities, but carefully contextualized teaching is needed.

The Bible is concerned about the worship of God. Scholars believe that cultic-prophets who helped the priests with temple worship, composed Psalms which were used in temple liturgies.  

Parsons draws attention to the Old Testament passages quoted in Hebrews 1:5-13 which refer to the pre-existence of Jesus. These ‘should be understood as a Christological hymn which traces the entire Christ event, including the pre-existence, earthly life, and the exaltation of Christ’.  

With great interest we note that all the Psalms quoted in Hebrews are Psalms of worship, or pilgrimage songs, expressing the longing, the gratitude, and the faith of God’s people. The Epistle to the Hebrews is built on worship. In 1:6 the angels are commanded to worship the Son of God; the Priesthood of Jesus is about the worship of God’s people; the heavenly gathering is centred in worship (12:22-24); and believers are admonished to meet together for worship (10:25) so that they can ‘continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess His name’ (13:15).

With some variations in different places, the worship patterns followed in Melanesian churches today are those imported by the missionaries. For Christians, Sunday worship is focussed on the victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ. As we have identified Jesus as the Melanesian Supreme Ancestor in this thesis, He would not be offended if Melanesians were to organize their worship of Him in meaningful Melanesian cultural ways. In whatever way(s) they organize their Sunday services, Melanesians must give place to their ancestors, and other departed members of their communities, in their worship. This will cater for the role the ancestors played in preparing the people for the coming of Christianity, even if the focus of life is now on Christ. It will also provide opportunity to draw the attention of the people very positively to God’s love and goodness, who through the ‘once-for-all sacrifice’ of Jesus, has welcomed them into His home in heaven, together with believers from many parts of the world. Hebrews has pointed out that believers on earth are participants of the heavenly worship. It will be right and proper for heavenly worshippers to be included.

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108 Parsons, ‘Son and High Priest’, 206.
as participants of worship and celebration on earth. In so doing, they with us become that great cloud of witnesses of Jesus, as together we fix our eyes on Him, 'the Author and Perfector of our faith' (Heb 12:2). This will create a positive and meaningful way of bringing the living-dead members of the community into the church buildings as fellow worshippers of Jesus, the enthroned God and King of humanity. It will challenge Christians to persevere in their faith and offer opportunity to the non-Christian members of the community to think about God and their relationship with Him.

6:5 SUMMARY
Christianity and Melanesian ancestral heritage have joined hands as friends or partners in marriage. There are many mutually-agreeable areas where the partners can work together in harmony. To enjoy a life-long partnership, Christianity, as a way of life, and Melanesian ancestral heritage, also as a way of life, need to fix their eyes on Jesus the true foundation of both ways of life. Jesus Christ in a human body is God's once-for-all answer to meet all human needs. It is important, therefore, to have the message about Jesus Christ presented in meaningful and contextualized ways.
CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

7:1 INTRODUCTION
As an exploratory missiological study, this thesis sets out the relationship between ancestral heritage and the Gospel or Christianity; more specifically, the relationship between Melanesian ancestors and Jesus Christ. We have in this thesis established the fact that there is a progression from the Melanesian world into the world of Christianity. Although marriage between Melanesian ancestral heritage and Christianity has been consummated on Melanesian soil, Melanesians continue to view Christianity as a foreign intruder, a white-people’s religion. The argument presented in the thesis seeks to counteract this fundamental misunderstanding Melanesians have by pointing out that Christianity is for all people, including Melanesians. As a conclusion to the thesis, the following four areas will be covered:

- Assessment of Preliminary Questions
- Thesis Conclusions
- Areas for Further Research
- Conclusion

7:2 ASSESSMENT OF PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS
In chapter one, a series of six questions were proposed as the basis for testing the content of this thesis. These questions will now be assessed.

7:2:1 The Significance of Belief in the Ancestral Spirits for the Lives of Melanesians
The wisdom established and passed on by the ancestors through the ancestral Lo had become the bedrock or the guiding principle of Melanesian communities. The ancestral Lo forms the basis for integrating the visible and the invisible communities. This integration represents the relationship the people enjoyed in this life and continues into
the world of the dead. The bond between the living and the living-dead causes Melanesians to view their history, their attitudes to time, space, and the ancestral Lo as having personal benefit for them.

In addition to believing in and relating to their ancestors, Melanesians also commonly believed in the existence of a Supreme Being who was believed to be superior to their ancestors. The people called on this Supreme Being when their ancestors did not help them as they expected. The answers they received from the Supreme Being made them believe that some issues were beyond the abilities of their ancestors. They learned that what could not be solved in human terms belonged to the realm of the supernatural, and must be seen and explained in supernatural terms. They kept close communication with their ancestors, so that, perhaps perchance, their ancestors might have discovered the answer to this puzzle in life.

7:2:2 Elements in Melanesian Ancestral Heritage Which Prepared the People for the Coming of the Gospel

Apart from the belief in the existence of life beyond death and the belief in a Supreme Being, the experiences the people went through in times of extremity, the dreams they had, and their ancestral myths prepared Melanesians for the coming of Christianity. Dreams took the people on journeys out of this world into the world of the spirits. In their dream journeys they encountered youthful beings and places full of laughter and joy as well as deep gloom, filled with deathly stench. In dreams, the people saw realities which were out of this world. They knew them to be real but did not know how to take hold of them. The people also had some ancestral myths which told them of people with light-red skins who would come to them with something new to give to them, as in the following example,

On 17 March 1955, Roy Austin and myself (Kay Liddle), Christian Brethren missionaries from Tasmania and New Zealand, set off with eight young men of the Abau tribe from the Green River Mission station on an exploratory patrol northwards, into the mountains lying along the border of Dutch New Guinea (now Irian Jaya, a province of Indonesia). Green River Mission station had been established the year before and we were looking to find an airstrip site in what was then regarded as uncontrolled territory where most of the people had had no contact with Europeans. On the fourth day, after passing through three different language groups, where all communication was done through signs and a few words and phrases picked up by a mono-lingual approach, we came across a fairly large and undulating grass clearing in the rain forest, which we had previously observed from the air. At different points on the edge of the clearing we came across rough bush shelters with ashes which were still warm. Our Abau
helpers noticed recent footprints and other signs of human presence, but we saw no one. There was an eerie silence with none of the customary bird calls, and we felt we were being watched. Everyone was on edge. Roy and I encouraged our helpers with prayers for safety and protection for the great work we were engaged in and went about our task of measuring and taking levels and compass bearings of the clearing. Despite our calls and the leaving of presents, no one appeared. The Abaus refused to camp there so we walked till dusk until we reached a spot where they felt it was safe to spend the night. We did have some exciting contacts with groups of startled people on our journey to and from the clearing, but none at all at the site of what was to become the airstrip and mission station of Amanab.

Three years later, I (Liddle) was invited to return to Amanab, to provide some linguistic assistance with establishing an alphabet and understanding the grammatical structure. I explained to the young man who was my informant, that I had come to this place with Roy when we first marked out the airstrip. He said, ‘Yes, I know. I was there in the jungle with the other armed men watching you. We had planned to ambush and kill you. But an old man reminded us of one of our legends that had been passed down for generations. It foretold that one day, two of our ancestors would return to this clearing, and that would be the commencement of a good time for our tribe. He said, you two strange beings with light-red skins could be our ancestral spirits returned in human form to help us. “Don’t kill them”, he said, “let us observe and listen”.’ We, and later they, believed that generations before, God had prepared a way for the reception of His Good News in due time.¹

The legend which prepared the way for the coming of the Gospel into the Green River area, saved the lives of the pioneering missionaries, and provided the people with the opportunity to hear God’s message. Other stories, like nabelan-kabelan, and the fight between a bird and a snake found among the Dani of the Great Biliem Valley in West Papua are examples of preparatory stories.²

7:2:3 Many Melanesians Still Believe that Christianity is a White-People’s Religion

Although Melanesians were prepared for the coming of Christianity, in many places the people still persist with their ancestral practices. For many Melanesians, being a Christian is understood as belonging to a denomination, adopting a certain way of life, adhering to and practising a new set of rituals. The process of pacification which forced the people to stop practising cannibalism, sorcery, witchcraft, and magic, encouraged many of the people to see the changing of these customs as the way to be a Christian. A

¹ Written notes received from one of the two pioneering missionaries, Kay Liddle, July 2001.
² This thesis, pages 40, 41.
great Melanesian Christian statesman and a national leader, Leslie Bosito, a Solomon Islander, complained

that when missionaries came to the mission fields, they transplanted Western faith in a theological pot, and instead of taking out the ‘plant’ and placing it in the local soil, they kept it in the pot and nurtured it with a Western environment and climate. This Christianity has been seen and taken as a foreign religion.³

This, however, is not the full picture of Christianity in Melanesia. In spite of their shortcomings, many missionaries did their work with a strong commitment and loyalty to the God who sent them to Melanesia. Many of them took the culture of the people seriously. They learned and spoke the language of the people like nationals. They translated the Scriptures, preached the Gospel, and brought the people to true faith in God. The existence of Christianity in a country like Papua New Guinea, where 96 percent of the population, according to the 1980 government census, claim to belong to different religious groups, is a credit to their hard work. Christianity, firmly rooted in Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, has become the faith of Melanesians. The urgent task that needs to be done today is to faithfully contextualize the Gospel into the Melanesian culture.

7:2:4 The Belief of the People and the Structure of Their Communities as the Basis for Meaningful Contextualization of the Gospel

Understanding the belief of the people and the way they think and relate to one another provides avenues for a meaningful communication of the Gospel. The Sentanians, like all Melanesian communities, have many spirits to whom they relate. Their thinking and their beliefs are spirit-centred, especially on their ancestral spirits who have taken on different modes of existence at death. The Sentanians continue to relate to their ancestors Mahowie, Tariaka, Taime, and others, for their needs. The Sentanians also believe that the spirits of the recent dead (maseh) communicate with their living relatives after burial.

The Sentanian leadership structure is hereditary in nature. The kose symbolizes this hereditary leadership structure and the blessing associated with it. The ondoporo kabang is the apex of Sentanian leadership structure. The ondoporo kabang is the community’s yopa-yangpa (son of the village and the roof) or naribuna-waribunapa

³ Havea, ‘Christianity in the South Pacific’, 11.
(son of the life-giving-water). The names symbolize the status of the ondoporo kabang as the political and spiritual leader of his people. The position of the ondoporo kabang is one sanctioned by the ancestral spirits. For Christianity to be meaningful, it needs to be carefully related to the ondoporo kabang, as we have done in this thesis. Jesus being God’s first-born, He is presented as the Ondoporo Kabang of the Sentanians. Jesus is therefore responsible for their well-being and the replacement of their ancestors on whom the people depended for all their needs.

7:2:5 The Relationship Between Belief in the Ancestral Spirits and the Gospel
The Gospel allows the living to honour and remember their ancestors, but not to worship them. The good legacy from the ancestors set out in chapters 5 and 6 is compatible with the Gospel and should be used in conjunction with the Gospel for the growth and the development of Christian faith and life in Melanesia. The Gospel message needs to be carefully related to useful cultural bridges to make Christianity meaningful to Melanesians. The Melanesian ancestral heritage as a way of life, and Christianity as a way of life, have much to contribute to each other. The incarnation of Jesus Christ tells us that God takes human culture very seriously and uses it to make His will known to the people.

The Gospel, on the other hand, contains elements which set Jesus above the ancestors. Jesus is different from the ancestors because He is the Son of God. Jesus came from heaven to open the door for human beings to enter heaven through faith in Him. Jesus offers human beings eternal life which the ancestors cannot provide. God the Father has placed Jesus His Son as God and King once-for-all to rule with justice from the throne of grace. The ancestors and the living members of the community are dependent on Jesus for eternal life and their day-to-day necessities for life. The new life Jesus offers comes from God. No human ancestors could offer eternal life to their descendants. No human ancestors could accomplish what Jesus achieved for human salvation, or be accorded such a high and honourable position which God has bestowed on Jesus His Son. Through Jesus, therefore, all communities have free access into the presence of God, the Supreme Being, for personal and community audience with Him.
7:2:6 The Evangelical Christian Understanding of the Relationship Between Ancestral Heritage and Christianity

Evangelicals see belief in the existence of the ancestral spirits at death to be complementary to the truth enshrined in the Gospel that the spirits of the dead continue to live on. The ancestral Lo, which ties the people to the ancestral spirits, prepared Melanesians for the coming of the Gospel. Evangelicals believe that God uses human culture to make the Gospel the eternal and all-embracing message relevant to the people in their given locality. Evangelicals also believe that human ancestors are part of the community of the living. As such, the community can continue to honour and respect them and follow the good example they have set for their communities. The discussion in chapter 6 of this thesis clearly sets out many areas in Melanesian ancestral heritage which evangelicals believe are compatible with, or bridges to accommodate, Christianity.

Evangelicals, on the other hand, hold to the view that all human culture is tainted with sin and that some aspects of them are demonic. Evangelicals are convinced that when people embrace Christianity, all that is demonic which hinders the progress of the Christian life in holiness and godliness must be cut out once-and-for-all. The Bible, as God’s living Word, is the book which sets forth God’s will and direction for life for Christians. Whatever culture people belong to, whatever their achievements or status, the Bible sets the standard they are to live by.

Evangelicals adhere to the Biblical witness that the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history is one and the same Person. He is Jesus Christ the Lord. The incarnation testifies to the fact God has come to live among the people in the Person of His Son, to redeem the people from their sins through the death of His Son, to make them God’s children. Jesus came from heaven to bring many people to God as His children, when they, by faith, accept His atoning sacrifice for the forgiveness of their sins and their eternal salvation. The faith Christians have is faith in Jesus who became a human being, suffered, died, rose victoriously from death, is enthroned at God’s right hand, and who one day will come to make all things new.

7:3 THESIS CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis we have consistently pointed out that the Melanesian ancestral heritage has played a very important role in preparing the way for the coming of Christianity. Melanesian ancestors, like John the Baptist, have prepared the way for the coming of
Jesus. Now that Jesus has come, the Melanesian ancestors, like John the Baptist, should stand back and let the people see Jesus clearly and be drawn to Him.

Melanesian communities were dependent on the community elders for their well-being. It was the responsibility of the community leaders to guard the ‘faith’ of the community. They were the custodians of the ancestral Lo as representatives of the ancestors. The criterion for community leadership so far as Christianity is concerned is faith in Jesus Christ. In the past, before anyone was accepted as a traditional community elder, they had to undergo the appropriate initiation disciplines. The crucial issue was entering into the presence of the eponymous ancestor in order to know and be known by him or her. In the new context, before the elders are inducted as custodians of the Christian faith, they should know God personally through faith in Jesus Christ. They should then be given some teaching related to faith and some key doctrinal topics. They should certainly learn about leading people to faith in Jesus Christ, and good follow-up methods to enable them to bring new Christians to maturity in their faith and become responsible Christians in their communities. As custodians of the Christian faith, community leaders must hold on to their faith, and encourage the community to press forward on their Christian pilgrimage.

Since Christianity is now the established faith of a great majority of Melanesians, careful evaluation of the ancestral heritage and the Gospel is not only urgent but should be done continually. The Melanesian ancestral heritage, as the way of life of the Melanesians, has many good and valuable elements in it. Its ingredients should be proudly treasured and used to express faith in Jesus Christ in Melanesian ways. Careful discussion of such issues as sorcery, witchcraft, and magic should take place by involving the whole community. Clear and meaningful Bible studies, carefully explaining what God thinks about these practices, are very necessary.

Melanesians should decide what the Gospel really is, and have it properly delineated, and proclaim it meaningfully to bring the people to faith in Jesus Christ. Such Biblical passages as Heb 1:1-14; Col 1:15-20; Phil 2:6-11; Acts 2:22-35; Jn 1:1-18; have much to say about the Gospel.

In chapter 5 we pointed out that, because Jesus’ Priesthood is based on ‘the power of an indestructible life’ (Heb 7:16), Jesus has become the High Priest of all the peoples of the world. On this basis, Jesus offers all Melanesians eternal solidarity with Him as their Supreme Ancestor, and eternal security to every one in every clan and tribe
who has faith in Him. So far as the people’s eternal destiny and acceptance with God is concerned, Jesus is the replacement of their ancestors.

Jesus is presented in this thesis as the foundation and the apex of Melanesian communities. The Gospel which proclaims Jesus Christ supersedes the Melanesian ancestral heritage because it offers the people a better and surer foundation on which to anchor their faith. As the Gospel supersedes Melanesian ancestral heritage, so Jesus supersedes all Melanesian ancestors. Melanesians are to look to Him only in their journey from earth to heaven. In this respect, Jesus is the replacement for the ancestors (see Figure 5a and Figure 5b).

![Diagram](attachment:figure5a.png) ![Diagram](attachment:figure5b.png)

Figure 5a Figure 5b

Jesus replaces the ancestors. The direction of the arrow from Figure 5a to Figure 5b shows that the role played by the ancestors over community life is now taken over by Jesus.

7.4 AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The Oceania region is a rich gold mine in the world for on-going research and study. The following issues raised in this thesis suggest a number of research topics:

- The sacrifice of Jesus and its meaning for Melanesia.
- The Lordship of Jesus over the environment
- The Christian community as a tribe of God
- The theology of retribution
- The theology of death
7:5 CONCLUSION
Melanesian ancestral heritage as a way of life, passed down by the ancestors to their descendants, cannot be completely done away with. Christianity needs to build on Melanesian ancestral heritage. Melanesian ancestral heritage and Christianity will continue to co-exist side-by-side. Christian missiology, however, reinforces the claims of the Gospel; as they have affected millions of people in Melanesia: in terms of the people's eternal salvation, their relationship with God, and for the well-being of their day-to-day living they need to turn away from their ancestors and look to Jesus only. Everything which Jesus does and will do for the community is well summed-up in the closing prayer recorded in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and in the assurance of His never-changing faithfulness.

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip [us] with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever, Amen (Heb 13:20). Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever (Heb 13:8).
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