

THE NAME OF GOD IN MELANESIA

– Rufus Pech

[In “Correspondence”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 1-2, it was pointed out that the Toaripi name for the Godhead, shown in this article, was incorrect. The correct names are now shown for this online version. –Revising ed.]

1. An Historical Sample

In a letter of March 14, 1881, missionary G. Bergmann of Siar, a few miles north of Madang, tells how he used his “magic lantern” to illustrate his telling of the creation, and of Adam and Eve in paradise, to the villagers. When he had finished his presentation the villagers responded with a tactful “You are quite right, but the Creator is not called Jehovah, but Kiliwob.”⁹ The missionary commented in his letter that the name Jehovah had already been introduced at the Rhenish Mission’s first station at Bogadjim, and *in the interests of unity* the Siars would have to get used to calling the Creator, Jehovah.

Meanwhile Bergmann’s colleague, Kunze, who had settled on the rim of Kulubob Bay on Karkar in July 1890, was told by his Takian-language informants on Karkar and Bagabag islands that three *tiwud* of truly gigantic stature, *Kelibob*, *Manubbe*, and I, had shared the creation of the world between them.

The arguments among the Lutheran missionaries of Madang regarding the relative merits of *Tibud Kilibob* or *Tibud Anute*, as compared with *Tibud Jehovah*, to designate the God of the Old Testament, continued for many years. A few months before his death in Sydney in mid-1904, Bergmann announced at the missionaries’ language conference that he had long had doubts regarding the use of *Kilibob* for the divine NAME, as had been done at Siar ever since that “magic lantern” evening in 1891, and that from now on he would only use the name *Anut*. His successor, Helmich, announced in 1907 that this matter had been formalised, but it is clear that the decision in favour of *Anut*

was not made without inner reservations, and had been swayed in part by the fact that the Neuendettelsau Lutherans in the Morobe Province had decided for *Anutu* in both their coastal and mountain missions. He expresses the continuing problem thus:

The word “*Anute*” is not quite unknown to our people, but is never used in their legends. Here we hear constant references only to *Kilibob*. He made their dwelling-places, sun, moon, and stars, etc., and also the people, and gave them all their customs and usages. Since the *Kilibob* legends contain much that is impure, we have shied away from using this word for the true and holy God.¹⁰

This decision, right or wrong, has had a powerful influence on the course of events in church and society in Madang Province to the present day. Because the majority agreed that *Tibud Anut* was of marginal significance only, a later generation of Christians concluded that their prayers were unheard, because they were delivered to the wrong address – the missionaries had fooled them into *praying to the wrong god*. So many of them switched to either God-*Manub*, or Jesus-*Kilibob*, respectively – but with inconclusive results.

Meanwhile the Kate- and Jabem-speaking Christians of Morobe had the same economic frustrations, but stuck with *Anutu* as the highest God.

Along the Sepik coasts, and their offshore islands, it would seem that *Wunekau* (and other variants of the same name: *Ongkai*, *Wonka*, *Wanakau*, etc.) would have been a natural choice for the Creator’s NAME. The people of the Aitape area had assured their pioneer SVD missionary Meyer: “The same one whom you call God (Gott) we call *Wunekau*.” Meyer agreed that *Wunekau* did indeed have the right attributes for the role.

He hears and sees all, and knows the languages of all the peoples whose areas he traverses. He is of great wisdom and might. The people fear him more than they love him.¹¹

Nonetheless *Wunekau* was no distant skybound deity. He was invoked by builders, musicians, and craftsmen; for protection on the journey, and before battle; for prosperity in the garden, and on the hunt; in particular, before the felling of a forest giant, for healing in sickness, and to slow down the body's decay after death.

But, no doubt, there were other considerations which induced the missionaries to stick with the imported designation Gott/God. *Wunekau*'s chief representation was the sun, in its two-fold aspect: the rising sun (light), and the setting sun (dark). He was also the deity around whose name the men's cult *parak*, in its two-fold aspect, revolved. And so on.

The SVD missionaries were not alone in this decision to play it safe. The Wedau Pentateuch, published by the Anglicans in 1947, abounds in unassimilated English loan words and biblical proper names in their English form. Thus Deut 10:17 reads: "*BADA ami God, tauna gods ai God, ma babada ai Bada*" (The LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords).

A trenchant critic comments on the unassimilated use of God/gods:

We have here a word with zero meaning, which must be explained, not only inasmuch as it designates God, but also as it is used to convey the pagan conception of "god", respectively, "gods" (cf. Ex 12:12 Egypt *ana* gods). In which way, however, can it be explained, if not by the aid of the Wedauan vocabulary, and of already existing religious notions, i.e., by the aid of words, one of which might possibly have served as a rendering of *elohim* if one had earnestly sought for it.¹²

2. A Regional Sample, 1950

Rosin summarises the situation in the New Guinea Bible translations and New Testament translations available in 1950, regarding terms used for translation of *elohim* in the Old Testament, and *theos* in the New Testament:

1. In Dutch New Guinea: the Malay-Arabic (*Alla(h)*) was used throughout.
2. In the Lutheran area: *Anutu* (Kate), *Anute* (Regatta), and *Anoto* (Jabem).
3. In the Anglican area: Wedau, Mukawa, Binandere, Notu: **God** used throughout.
4. In extreme S-E Papua, Anglicans, Methodists, and LMS had agreed to use *Eaubada* (“I am great”) in the Suau and Dobu scriptures.
5. Elsewhere variety abounded in the Papuan region:
 - a. *God* used in Kiwai and Kunini (LMS), with *Iehovah* for *theos* in the New Testament. *Iehovah* was also used for *theos* in the New Testament of neighbouring Goaribari, and of the Panaieti of far-distant Deboyne Island, and by the Liebenzell Mission on Manus from 1921. *Eloi* was used to translate *el/ehohim* by the LMS for the Namau language of Papua.
 - b. Elsewhere, the LMS used indigenous generic or proper names: *Harihu* (Orokolo), *Atute* (Toaripi) [the correct Toaripi names should be: God the Father – *Ualare Oa*, God the Son – *Ualare Atute*, God the Holy Spirit – *Arahoha Lareva*], *Dirava* (Motu), *Palagu* (Keapora, Hula), *Oeva* (Mailu).

Rosin comments:

What we must deplore in view of this multiplicity is not the diversity of the renderings itself, but rather the diversity of the principles, or their absence. *Eloi*, *Iehovah* (for *theos*) and *God* ought to be eliminated altogether.¹³

3. An Aside: Concerning titles, proper names and nicknames

Before we go on to discover some of these principles, a few words are in place concerning:

- a. Generic names or titles – unusually translatable.
- b. Proper names – normally untranslatable, but can be transliterated.
- c. Cognomens – i.e., surnames, descriptive nicknames, family names, “last names”.

A couple of examples to illustrate:

	<i>Title:</i>	<i>Proper Name:</i>	<i>Cognomen:</i>
Local PNG:	Sir	John	Guise
Historical:	Pharaoh	Raamses	“the Great”
Biblical:	<i>Elohim</i>	<i>YHWH</i>	<i>Tsebaoth</i>

(in the order: *YHWH Elohim Tsebaoth*)

4. Generic names for God

The Bible opens with the majestic words: “In the beginning God . . .” = *Elohim*, and this title is used in place of the NAME with liturgical regularity to describe the creation of the heavens and of the earth, ending 2:4a. Then, from 2:4b the term *YHWH Elohim* is used consistently (a total of 20 times) till the story of the making of Adam and of their fall into disobedience is complete in 3:24. In this narrative, it is only the serpent who avoids the use of the NAME in 3:1, 3, 5, and speaks only of *Elohim*, using it again as an independent designation of God, as we might do in talking about someone merely as “Sir”.

From this, one could already form the suspicion that *Elohim* and *YHWH* are not synonyms, which can just be traced back to the preferences of the “Elohist” and “Yahwist” traditions within Israel, and which the translator, teacher, or communicator of the Word can interchange at will.

Since it is the Jewish scriptures we are discussing, we would do well to listen to their rabbis’ insights into the differences between *Elohim* and *YHWH*:

For the rabbinical exegetes, it seems to be a fixed principle that the word *elohim* designates God as the Righteous, Judging One, but that *YHWH* designates him as the Loving, Merciful One (Ex 34:6f). . . . According to Hertz, a modern Jewish expositor, *Adonay* (*YHWH*) is always used when God is spoken of in close relation to men or peoples, whereas *Elohim* designates God as creator and ruler of the universe. Thus, in the first chapter of Genesis, where the universe is seen as a whole, *Elohim* is used, but in the second chapter, which tells of the beginning of the history of mankind, this divine name is no longer used alone, but coupled with *Adonay* (*YHWH*).¹⁴

While *Elohim* is often used like a proper name, its function is more like that of a pronoun, which points to the proper NAME, which it designates.

The stem from which the Hebrew word *elohim* comes is used in the following forms: *el*, *eloah*, *elohim*, and with personal suffixes meaning “my god”, “your god”, “his god”, etc.; also with the definite article “*ha elohim*”, the god.

All of these may refer equally to Israel’s god (whom we honour with capital G), the heathen gods, and the representations of such gods – the idols. Further, they may refer to indefinite spirit powers, thought of as single, or (polytheistically) as plural, or as a composite “godhead”, or as an abstract quality – “godhood” or divinity.

Principles:

1. The designation *el*, etc., should always be translated by the nearest equivalent in the language the Bible is being translated into. This will be the word that most nearly covers the whole range of meanings indicated above.
2. Wherever the term is used objectively/ neutrally, either for the God of Abraham, etc., or for a heathen god or gods, the same term should be used. That is why the term chosen in

the language of translation must be capable of bearing all the meanings mentioned above for *el*, *elohim*, *eloah*.

3. The capital G should be used in English (or any translation which reflects English capitalisation usage) only when it is quite clear that only the God of revelation is meant by the writer or speaker. Thus, RSV correctly renders Jonah 1:6b, when the captain says to Jonah: “What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call upon your god! Perhaps the god will give some thought to us, that we do not perish.” Though Jonah’s god is “*YHWH*, the God of heaven”, the captain cannot know this until it is revealed in verse 9.

Thus *YHWH*, the God of revelation, lowers Himself to the level of the other spirit beings, whether real or imaginary, for the purpose of demonstrating His superiority over them, or so that men on earth, themselves, must decide which is the true *elohim*, purely on the merits of the case, as in 1 Kings 18:20 ff. Here it is clear that in vv. 21 and 24 the LORD and Baal are put on the same level for the moment, as *elohim*. The English translation, therefore, should not use a capital G until the final “He is God”, because the outcome of the contest is to show who is the true *elohim* – *YHWH* or Baal. We are not to prejudge it!

4. Finally, while a simple bible history or children’s bible may simplify the matter of the divine name(s) by simply using “God” wherever the NAME is indicated, any Bible translation worthy of the name should reflect faithfully the constant interplay of divine NAME, title, and cognomina, or designations, and do so consistently, so that the translation faithfully mirrors the original. To do less than this is to dishonour the NAME and glory of God.

I am distressed and perplexed to see a modern translation like the Takia (Karkar) Genesis, “*Mel Fidian san Fun*”, 1979, using *Tubud* throughout for both *elohim* and *YHWH*, in referring to the God of revelation, while employing a variety of terms for the other *elohim* in a passage like Gen

31:19-35 (admittedly this is a tough one to do consistently!). The effect is to eliminate the divine NAME entirely from the Book of Genesis, and to elevate the generic *Tubud* to the position of a proper name, which will almost inevitably be understood polytheistically, as a plural. Also, the usage of the languages of the area is ignored, which consistently use *tubud* as a singular proper noun, with the particular name of the “culture hero” designated whenever the sense of an indefinite composite entry is to be avoided.

At this point I should like to add a final, rather lengthy comment on *tibud*, and its cognates, in the Austronesian languages of the New Guinea mainland north coast area, since these provide the best choice for *elohim* in the Old Testament and *theos* in the New.

Throughout this essay, I have had in my sights only this Austronesian language family, since my competence in no way extends beyond it. This family extends, as is well known, from Madagascar (Malagasy) in the west, via the Indian offshore islands through Indonesia and the Philippines, and on through Micronesia and Polynesia, leaving behind numerous representatives throughout coastal and island Melanesia. In all major matters relating to language, including kinship terms, cultural and religious terms, each member of this far-flung family should be studied in the context of that family. It is no longer excusable for the translator or communicator of the gospel to concentrate solely on the single language of his choice. Surely, no one would deliberately choose tunnel vision to the 180° sweep of vision provided to normal eyesight!

The matter of *tibud* and its cognates, as far as I am aware of it, is: all stem from the ancient Sanskrit (Hindu) *dewata*, meaning god, godhead, and gods in a general way, just as does *el/elohim* for Hebrew, as a member of the Semitic language family. Thus we may find the following in the island groups to the west of us:

Sumatra (Batak) *debata*; North Celebes *duata*; S-W Central Celebes *deata*, all referring to god, gods, higher spirits of the air, as well as spirit understood dynamistically as vital energy, soul, etc.

Thus, in Malay and Indonesian *dewata/dewa* are used in translation for god/gods, as are *dewa* in Javanese and in Dyak (Borneo) and *deata/doesata*, which are the corresponding forms elsewhere in the archipelago.

In Sangirese *elohim/theos* are consistently rendered by *duata/ruata*; in the dialects of Batak, *Debata* (Toba), *Dibata* (Karo), *Leibata/Naiabata* (Sumalungun) are used for God and gods.

In the Philippines *divata/davata/dinata* denote the spirits/souls of the deceased.

For a full discussion, I refer you to Rosin's Appendix B, "On Translating the Divine Names in the Indonesian Archipelago", pp. 199-211.¹⁵

In light of the above, we can confidently append the Madang North Coast Austronesian languages to this list, where we have, just for starters: Bel-Nobonob-Amele *tibud*; Ziwo-Takia *tibud*, with the same spread of meanings from spirits, souls of the dead, and ancestors, to demigods and gods. When the white man appeared, he, too, was referred to as *tibud*. For Christians, it also means: the deity, godhead, God. To *tibud*, the Lutherans have attached the traditional name *Anut*, and the cognomina *Ujanzen* and *Zen* – of which, more later.

Having become aware also of the Motuan *dirava*, I would tentatively fit it in under *dewata* by a simple transposition of the second and third consonants – a common device in Austronesian languages – which would yield *divara* as a recognisable cognate of the parent Sanskrit *dewata*. And so one could go on. . . .

5. The Proper Name of God in the Old Testament

We have already met the Tetragrammaton (= Four-letter NAME) in Gens 2. In the course of the history of the People of God in the years of Exile it became the *unspoken* NAME honoured only in the heart of the faithful Jew, and so came to be forever the *unpronounceable* NAME.

Furthermore, since we know only its consonants, and must guess at its vowels, we cannot even know what its exact meaning may have been, if indeed it had such a meaning. Certainly, what has often been taken as its meaning – the words in Ex 3:14, translated by RSV as “I AM WHO I AM”, or, in brief, “I AM”, or perhaps the same cryptic sentence put into the future tense – this can suggest to us no more than that YHWH is the living, consistent, faithful One who was/is/will be Abraham’s God, and is, and remains the same, forever, and so should be known and honoured by the designation YHWH “throughout all generations”.

Besides this, there is no other proper name of God in the Old Testament. All the rest are titles, cognomina, descriptive ascriptions. Ex 15:3 reads *YHWH shemo!* YHWH is His Name! Ex 6:3 does not contradict this, as we have often been taught. It also states *shemi YHWH* = by My Name (YHWH) I was not known (to the fathers) but as *el shaddai*, “God Almighty”. This is a descriptive cognomen, not a Name proper.

Principles:

1. This NAME is basically untranslatable, and should not be translated into other languages. Even such admirable attempts as to write “I AM” for the Name, or to substitute for it the pronoun “HE” are unwise. Worst of all, is to substitute for it a basically philosophical term like “the Eternal”, as Moffat has done, following some French versions. The only substitution for it should follow that introduced in the Hebrew synagogue and first written in the LXX translation: *Adonai* (Hebrew) and *Kurios* (Greek).

2. Since the NAME is unpronounceable (because we are not sure which vowel sounds it should have), it is not wise to try to transliterate it into other languages. That is to say, it should not be re-supplied with vowels to fit the sound patterns of a given language, so that it can again be spoken, whether as Jehovah, Yahweh, Iehofa, or what have you. This is to make like any other name what is not a name like other names, whether of gods or of men.

It is no longer necessary for us to know His NAME, for it is the name of the God who has revealed Himself in His Word, and in His mighty acts, but chooses to remain hidden and mysterious in His NAME.

The NAME, and that mysterious repository of Israel's sacred objects, the Covenant Box, by their mystery and lack of concrete symbolism, always seek to discourage attempts to make Israel's Covenant God (*El Berith*) into a conventional idol. The God of Israel truly reveals Himself, but remains the God who cannot be manipulated by His creatures.

So the NAME has fallen silent, and its meaning remains a mystery until it is revealed at the beginning of a new age, in the Name of God's Son, Jesus Christ, "in whom all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell".

The message, "You shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins" points to the reality of the coming Saviour's ministry, but cannot be said to explain it. Only the life and works, death and rising again, of Jesus of Nazareth can, and do, do this.

During the "Great Missionary Century", and in its afterglow in the first half of this century, this aspect was widely overlooked, or consciously rejected, particularly in the USA, and idiosyncratic missionaries, eager to spread abroad the NAME of the God of Israel, propagated first *Jehovah*, and then *Yahweh*, as the name of the One True God in their

teaching and their vernacular Bible translations throughout the third world. It was not until the RSV appeared, that the traditional principle and usage were restored, and official attempts to write or pronounce the Tetragrammaton YHWH in English Bible translation were given up. This holds good for the GNB and NIV also. All have agreed to follow the precedent first established in the reading of the Hebrew Old Testament in the synagogues, and confirmed in all major translations beginning with the LXX.

3. That is, the principle is to substitute for the unpronounceable *YHWH* the Hebrew title *Adonai*, and its equivalents in the various translations. Consequently, when we use the proper name of God in the Old Testament, we should let Yahweh and Jehovah return to the classrooms from which they came, and use these approved substitutes in all translation and communication wherever possible. But let the *Hallelujahs* and *Hosannas* of worship continue to ring in praise around the earth, along with the “Abba Father” and *Kurie Eleison* of the New Testament.

Note that while the New Guinea Pidgin Jenesis (1973) still uses *Yawe* consistently wherever *YHWH* appears in the original, the *Eksodas* (1979) has quietly reverted to *Bikpela*. There remains just the further step of capitalising this in full to distinguish it from the not-infrequent cases where the Hebrew itself has *Adonai*. Thus, the continuing presence of the mysterious NAME would everywhere be indicated visibly, as in the original scriptures.

Similarly, in due course, I expect that the older Lutheran vernacular translations will drop *Anutu*, *Anoto*, *Anut*, as locally-acceptable substitutes for YHWH. Being also proper names of the genus *elohim*, their retention can only memorialise the fact that we missionaries have “revealed” to Melanesian converts what YHWH Himself denied the Israelites in their extremity, viz., a clear answer to their question (which is everyman’s question), What is His name? How problematical the

results of that missionary experiment could be we have noted on page 30.

6. The titles “*Adonai*” in the Old Testament and “*Kurios*” in the New

So far from deprecating the rabbinic “superstition”, which discontinued the pronunciation of the NAME, and substituted for it the non-religious title of honour, *Adonai*, we Christians can see in this development a happy aspect of the Father’s preparation for His Son, the coming Messiah. For He, JESUS Christ is the Lord (*Adonai*) of the individual disciple, and of the whole church. He is also the One in whom the hidden name YHWH becomes the revealed name JESUS. Not the name of a “god”, but the name of our brother, who is at the same time God’s Own Son, thus opening up the way for us to be restored as the adopted children of God.

The Jews’ substitution of *Adonai* for *YHWH* may be parallel to the use of the “secret language” of the Melanesian seafarers. Fear and respect of the *masalai* of the deep, combined to make them lay aside their ordinary everyday language and substitute for it the language of the deep, which is not a “real” language, but in which every word parallels one in everyday use.

The word *Adonai* is not the title, much less the name, of a “god” as such. Its use suggests, and points to, what is hidden and revered, the sacred NAME, YHWH. In itself, *Adonai* is a term of honour given to a social superior: to a king by his subjects, to a master by his slaves, to an employer by his workers, to the patriarchal father by his children and domestics.

In principle, it is therefore translatable and to be translated. In some members of the Austronesian language family cognates of the Hindu words *tuhan/tuan* and *raja/raj* appear to be available for use here. Thus the Bel (Graged) language of Madang has, whether knowingly or not, long used a compound made up of these two root words, to express the power and lordship of the Risen Lord Christ.

This is the compound *ujan-zen*, of which the first part is inflectable. The components are: *ujan (tuhan)* meaning: great, tall, big, grand, large, exalted, excellent; *zen (Raja)* meaning: very/exceedingly, large/many; great, renowned, mighty, noble, powerful; a title of respect and honour: lord!¹⁶ Examples of inflected forms: *Uj a-zen!* = O my Lord!; *Nga Ujagzen* = I am the Lord/the Almighty.

7. The Divine Cognomen in the Old Testament and New, in Relation to the One Name

As noted, the cognomina are not themselves proper names, but are set in apposition to the NAME, or alternatively to the title *El*, in one of its forms. There is only the one name of God in the Old Testament, YHWH – now superseded for us Christians who live in the new age of the New Testament. And there is only one NAME in the New Testament: JESUS; the name at which every knee must bow, whether of heavenly beings (*elohim*), earthly beings (humankind), or under-earthly beings (demonic powers) (Phil 2:9-11, cf. Is 45:23).

Like YHWH, the New Testament NAME (JESUS) is basically untranslatable. In every Christian society, it, too, gains its meaning and content from the believer's study and personal appropriation of the holy life, the saving death and resurrection of Him to whom the NAME is given. He, too, is the "I AM" of the New Testament (as John never tires of reminding us), parallel to YHWH in the Old Testament. In his case, too, the phrase "I AM" does not explain the mystery and reality of the Saving NAME, but, rather, deepens that mystery, and draws the disciple out to worship and adoration.

In principle, since the divine cognomina of the Old Testament are not proper names, though some may function as substitutes for the NAME, they are translatable, and should be translated consistently, even to the *bethel* of *El bethel*.

Basically, then, the New Testament descriptive cognomen *Christ* also should be translatable, since it, itself, is a translation of the Hebrew *Messiah*. This translation should be attempted, despite the fact that this step was not taken in European Bible translations. For, without

translation, it must start out as a zero term in any given language. The result in New Guinea is that, so far, “Christ” is little more than another name for Jesus. But it should not be seen as that.

To avoid being misunderstood, I will add something about the most mysterious cognomen of all in both the Old and New Testaments, that of *ruach/pneuma*: the Spirit. From Gen 1:2 to Rev 22:17, this focus of divine influence, though basically indescribable to humankind, has been experienced also as a person. This is because here the Almighty not only speaks to, and touches, but renews, empowers, and indwells the human beings whom He has chosen.

The “Spirit”, and the expanded terms, “the Spirit of YHWH” (OT), and “the Holy Spirit” (NT) is *not a third name* alongside YHWH and JESUS. This “third person of the Trinity”, as we describe him theologically, is not just the unpronounceable, but basically also the unnameable One.

As we began this enquiry with **EI** and **Elohim** meeting and confronting the **el** and **elohim** of primal religions, so we end it with “the Spirit”, and “the spirits”, and the “spirit of man” on the common ground where all are at home. Here again God’s self-disclosure reaches down to meet man’s gropings. His aim is that the unity, which primal man feels between himself and the “spirits”, may be reborn in an experience of unity, or fellowship, between the Holy Spirit the life-giver and the human spirit of a “new creature”, who is “in Christ” in the bonds of faith and love and hope.

This most-mysterious cognomen, too, must be translated – but the question is: in what terms? It was not by chance that the third aspect of Christ’s ministry was the casting out of evil spirits (*diamones*), so that they might give place to the Holy Spirit in the person thus delivered. But, for me, it remains an open question whether the precedent of the translation and use of *el/elohim* should be followed here, and that a neutral term be sought, which will show the generic link between the *diamones* and the “good Spirit” of God.

It appears that, by New Testament times, dualistic thinking had progressed to the point where a common term could no longer be used to cover the (demonic) spirits of the universe and the (holy) Spirit of God. But, since this antagonistic dualism is not commonly present in Melanesian belief systems, the dilemma remains: Do we follow the Melanesian and Old Testament patterns and emphasise the generic likeness between the nature spirits¹⁷ and the creative “Spirit of God that moved over the face of the water”, Gen 1:2? Or are we justified in underlining the difference, and even carrying the New Testament trend one step further by *consistently* adding the adjectivals “evil, etc.”, to the one side, and “holy, etc.”, to the other side in our translations and communication?

Conclusion

Let me wind up with a few provocative suggestions, which may be of interest of communicators who use the New Guinea Pidgin Bible:

I would like to debate the proposition that, for New Guinea Pidgin, it is not yet too late, and still desirable, that a Melanesian substitute for the zero loan word *God* be found to translate *elohim* of the Old Testament and *theos* of the New. For this, the word *tambaran* alone suggests itself as suitable, provided we Christians can lay aside certain prejudices. It does not matter whether its etymology is traced through Kuanua back to Sanskrit *dewata* or to PMP (*t)umpu*, which signifies: ancestor, lord.¹⁸

Also, I would propose for debate that the word *masalai* be used in the Pidgin New Testament as a satisfactory equivalent for the Hellenistic Greek *daimon*, in place of the present unsatisfactory, and “loaded, alternatives of *spirit nogut* or *spirit doti*. For, like *elohim*, the *daimon* may have a neutral, and even a positive, aspect, just as is the case with Pidgin *masalai*, and its vernacular equivalents. (See endnote 6.)

These final proposals may sound naïve, and even fatuous, but, behind them, lies a plea to both expatriates and Melanesians involved in rendering and communication of the gospel and of the Word:

- that we open our eyes wider, and attempt to get rid of inherited tribal and linguistic tunnel vision;
- that we not emphasise mankind's, or Melanesia's, social and linguistic disunity and particularism;
- that we remind ourselves that HE (YHWH) has made of one all the nations of the earth, and given to each its own place in time and space, but that He has also placed us into racial and linguistic families (of which I have only touched on one);
- that we gratefully acknowledge that, through these racial and linguistic families, we have unsuspected relatives far and wide upon the face of the Earth, which is YHWH's in all its fullness.

REFERENCES

⁹ Taken from the writer's unpublished thesis, R. Pech, "Myth, Dream, and Drama: Shapers of a People's Quest for Salvation", 1979.

¹⁰ Pech, "Myth, Dream and Drama", pp. 77f.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

¹² Hellmut Rosin, *The LORD is GOD: the Translation of the Divine Names and the Missionary Calling of the Church*, Amsterdam: Nederlandsche Bijbelgenootschap, 1956, p. 87.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21, referring to J. H. Hertz, *Pentateuch and Haftoras*, vol 1, Genesis, Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 1926-1935.

¹⁵ Rosin, *The LORD is GOD*.

¹⁶ Taken from John F. Mager, *Gedaged-English Dictionary*, Columbus OH: Board of Foreign Missions of the American Lutheran Church, 1952. pp. 301-355.

¹⁷ New Guinea Pidgin: *masalai bilong graun*; *Bel* (Madang): *buga* – linguistically akin to Slavic *Boh* = god, God?

¹⁸ Mager, *Gedaged-English Dictionary*, p. 322.