

TRADITIONAL TOABAITAN METHODS OF FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

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INTRODUCTION

Division is a very real problem in the world today: divisions among nations, and divisions among Christians. There are many broken relationships that are left unsolved, and no one dares to care about these broken relationships. In Melanesia, many types of problems, related to divisions, exist: clan problems, racial discrimination, and political injustice. As a Melanesian Christian leader, what am I to do? Do I have something to contribute toward resolving these situations? I feel strongly that the message and ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation is very urgent, and is appropriate for the Melanesian world today.¹ My goal in this article is threefold:²

1. To give help to those who are in leadership positions, and who encounter problems in this area in their ministry.
2. To give guidance to those who wish to do some study on the subject.
3. To give help to Christians who wish to live in right relationships with fellow Christian believers, but have problems in the area of forgiveness and reconciliation.

¹ Penuel Ben Indusulia, "Biblical Sacrifice Through Melanesian Eyes", in *Living Theology in Melanesia, Point 8* (1985), p. 263.

² *Ibid.*, p. 263.

Today, one of the greatest needs of my people, the Toabaitans of Solomon Islands, is forgiveness and reconciliation. I know this subject is very broad, both, in its theory, and in its practical sense; however I want to narrow it down to three points:

1. The traditional way of expressing forgiveness and reconciliation.
2. The strengths and the weakness of traditional forgiveness and reconciliation.
3. The biblical teaching of the subject.

LOCATION OF TOABAITA AND ITS SOCIAL STRUCTURE

LOCATION OF TOABAITA

When someone wishes to study and learn the culture of any particular group of people, one needs to know, and be able to identify, the location of that group of people in the geographical world. It is better, still, if one could visit the area, and get to know the people personally, rather than just reading from other writers. Nevertheless, the island country of the Solomons is a chain of islands that lies to the southeast of Papua New Guinea, and to the northeast of Australia. It received its independence in 1978. The Solomons is made up of six main islands: Choiseul, New Georgia, Santa Isabel, Guadalcanal, San Cristobal (Makira), and Malaita. The main inhabitants of the six main islands are Melanesians, while those of the smaller islands are Polynesians. Malaita is the most densely-populated island of the Solomons.

Language is a common problem in all Melanesians countries. North Malaita, alone, has four different spoken dialects: Baegu, Baelelea, Lau, and Toabaita. The above four groups are locally divided under two main groups of people. The Baegu, Baelelea, and Toabaita, who occupy the inland, are called the “bush” people. The Lau people occupy the little islands (which are mostly man-made) along the lagoon that lies to the northeast of North Malaita. They are locally termed as “salt-water” people.

DEFINITION OF TOABAITA

The word *toabaita* is a combination of two words: *toa* and *baita*. *Toa* means “people” and *baita* means “big”. There are two main interpretations of the word *toabaita*. The first interpretation links it with the physical build of the people, as being big in stature. In the past, people believed that the Toabaita were big people. From the word passed on by mouth through the generations, we were told that the Toabaita were physically big, which confirms this idea. The second interpretation links it with the typical characteristics of the Toabaita people.

Firstly, the Toabaita people are viewed as very aggressive. They do not take things lightly. Often a person, who has a very bad temper, is described as a person whose *biranana e baita*. This refers to the person’s own character. In singular terms, *nau wane baita* means, “I am a big man”. There is a myth, known very well throughout Toabaita, as *Biu Wane tha Forafak*. The title of this myth really describes the character of male Toabaitans.

Secondly, Toabaita is more of an independent term in its meaning. It is hard to accept another’s idea or views. Nowadays, we think of the term “Toabaita” as a curse, because of the aggressiveness, the unforgiveness, and the individual independence that characterise the people of Toabaita.³

GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The traditional social structure of Toabaitan society is that each family has its own homestead, separated from the next patch of bush. There is nothing to be described as a village. Married sons may live close to their parents, but it may not be, strictly speaking, within the same clearing.

When asked why they live apart, the normal response is, “We live harmoniously, and remain united by living apart.” Fights, rows, and friction arise when people live crowded together. If a group of people,

³ Ibid., p. 256.

or a family, is found, there is always a house for men, while the women live separately in different houses.

Those within the same clan live within their land boundary. For instance, those who belong to Uala must live within the Uala boundary, and the same for the Omba, Ulubiu, Takinaano, or Manafui. The mountain ranges and streams can easily identify the boundary divisions.

The people of each clan are often spoken of as the *Biu Wane*. When translated, *Biu* means “house”, and *Wane* means “men”. Therefore, the *Biu Wane Lo Ki Uala* literally means “the people of Uala”. This excludes the women, because Toabaitan men are connected with everything, but not so for the women. In traditional Toabaita social structure, there is no such as a chief, but there is a priest, and a war hero.⁴

THREE NEW KINDS OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Township

Although it may be too small to be called a town, in the truest sense of the term, Malu’u station could well be termed a town. According to their own evaluation, it is a town, on the basis that it has the Western kind of flash, permanent buildings, and electricity. It is the centre of a Western system of education, the centre for workers (on a small scale) from different parts of Malaita, or even from other islands, and the shopping centre for Western goods. This is a good enough standard for the local Toabaita people to refer to Malu’u station as their own town. Under this kind of social structure, the government representatives maintain law and order.⁵

Village

The first missionaries introduced the village social structure in the early 1900s. It continued to develop with the help of Peter Ambuofa (one of the converts from the Queensland sugar fields) and other

⁴ Ibid., p. 257.

⁵ Ibid., p. 258.

converts to Christianity. These villages are termed Christian villages, even to this day, because it was Christians who populated them.

In these villages, the people are not strictly from the same clan, but could be a mixture of clans. The Uala, the Omba, the Takiniano, the Manafui, and the Ulubiu may find themselves living together in the same village, which would have been impossible within the traditional social structure. In this environment, the church pastors help to take responsibility in overseeing the people, otherwise a village chief is usually appointed.

Seeing that all of the villagers are Christian, though many village dwellers are nominal Christians, each village has its own church building, where they can carry out the practices of their new faith.⁶

The Traditional Social Structure Still Serves

Despite the fact that Christianity has been in the Toabaita area for 100 years, the traditional social structure still exists among the few people up in the mountains of North Malaita. They remain active in the traditional culture and religion of the Toabaita people, and still observe cultural taboos.

Husband and wives still live in their separate houses. The men live in the *Biu*, a term that refers to the men's house, and women live in the *luma* or *fera*, the women's houses. The priests of Toabaita traditional religion still carry out their function on behalf of the few who still remain faithful. Such a situation brings about problems in Toabaitan society, especially in the sphere of morality. Often there are situations, when men take the law of the country into their own hands, since the law of the country does not match the standards of the traditional society.⁷

⁶ Ibid., p. 259.

⁷ Ibid., p. 260.

EXCHANGES: A MEANS OF FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION RECONCILIATION IN TOABAITAN CULTURE

The concern with forgiveness and reconciliation, in Toabaita culture, comes from four areas. These are when relationships are broken between tribes, families, individuals, and when there is defilement against the ancestral spirits.

Whenever a relationship has been broken, a seeking to restore the relationship will occur. People in Toabaita will not allow problems to go unsolved, or relationships to remain unrestored. When the relationships with other groups, families, or individuals have been broken, they have to find the means to restore that broken relationship.

The local term *manatalubea*, “forgiveness”, involves an open public statement and action, which occurs when the cause of division between two lines, clans or tribes, families, or individuals has been resolved. This kind of *manatalubea* and *kwaimania*, “reconciliation”, is more than an exchange of mere words, there must be a symbol of reconciliation, given in front of the community.

There are two Toabaitan terms, which give the meaning of forgiveness and reconciliation:

- (a) *Manatalubea* means “forgiveness”; *menata* means “the mind or the thoughts of the heart”; *lubea* means “no longer bound by the offence”, and the obligation that must be satisfied.
- (b) *Kwaimania* means “reconciliation” – the offender and offended are no longer enemies but friends. However, without an exchange of gifts, there will not be true traditional forgiveness and reconciliation within the community.

TYPICAL EXCHANGES OF GIFTS IN TOABAITAN CULTURE

In traditional Toabaitan culture, the typical exchange is varied. The variation depends upon the sort of offence committed by various groups, families, or individuals. The exchanges are also measured

against the size of the offence, and the kind of person, against whom the offence was done. If the offence is against a single individual, then, obviously, the exchange will be small. It is another thing, if the offence is against a group. When the offence is serious, then the exchanges will be quite big and demanding.

Exchanges After Sorcery

The practice of sorcery is very common among some tribes of the Toabaita people. Sorcery practice is a very serious crime in traditional culture. Whoever is found practising sorcery among the tribe is worthy of death. It is thought that sorcery, and nothing else, always caused death in Toabaita. They believe that a spirit of sorcery is the cause of death.

Toabaitans were always eager to find out what causes the death of a person. The reason for their searching is the desire to identify the sorcerer, who is responsible for the death of a person. How do they find the sorcerer? The Toabaitan's process of finding the sorcerer is to ask questions such as, "Who caused problems for this dead person?" Questions such as these are the common ones asked by the dead man's relatives.

In their desire to find the sorcerer, the relatives of the dead person cut some hair from the corpse's head and body. The local term for this practice is known as *afumatala*, meaning "to wrap up in a small parcel the remains of the corpse".

The closest relatives of the dead man proceeds, after nightfall, to the *Gwa-Biu*, "cemetery", and burns the bamboo containing the hair, cut from the corpse, together with some flowers and leaves. These flowers all have a distinctive colouring, such as the scarlet hibiscus, a large white sweet smelling flower, a yellow flower, and the vivid red creeper. When the last ember is cold, the spirit possesses the specialist. According to Toabaitan belief, it is the dead man's spirit, who possesses the leader of the party, and leads them to the house of the sorcerer. We term this process *sule akalo*, which means "come follow the dead man's spirit".

The confirmation of this process occurs when the searchers see a tiny light shining brightly over the roof of the suspected person's house. Later on, the same party plans the date for a raid to take place. After killing the sorcerer, a plan for a peace settlement is carried out by the parties.⁸

The peace settlement is the responsibility of the leader of the tribe. In local terms, he is known as the *wane-inoto*, "rich man", or "mediator". The leadership, in traditional Toabaita, is given to the *wane-inoto*, because he is the means of settling problems. He brings forgiveness and reconciliation between two enemy tribes. He is a man of standing, and is ready to help in times of trouble.

In this section on the exchange of gifts, I will refer to Hogbin's book, *Experiments in Civilisation*. He wrote an account of the Takiniano tribe. Takiniano is one of the tribes within the Toabaitan area. My mother is from this tribe, and, therefore, I am a close member. Hogbin has written an excellent case study, in which he explains traditional forgiveness and reconciliation in Toabaitan culture.

Case Study One. According to Hogbin, the *wane-inoto*, "leader", of the Takiniano died. The whole tribe was moved by his death. In traditional culture, after the funeral, the sons announced their intention of killing the sorcerer, whoever he might prove to be. To attract others to join the raid, they publicly displayed all the valuables they had received from their father, and they indicated that these would be distributed among the raiding party. Having done this, they killed a sorcerer, named of Sekeo, while he was working in his garden with his wives. After their victory, they went back to hold a huge celebration. The sons killed all the pigs they had inherited. The wealth was also distributed among those who had taken part.

Several months later, the two tribes planned to put an end to their enmity, so that they would no longer be enemies but friends, and stop what we term as *funua* (the threat of continuous death on both sides).

⁸ Ian Hogbin, *Experiments in Civilisation: The Effects of European Culture on a Native Community of the Solomon Islands*, London UK: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1939, pp. 90-92.

Both sides agreed on the value of the gifts to be exchanged by both parties. The Takiniano people and Sekeo's tribe agreed that they should give four *tafuliae* (traditional red shell money) and 200 *lioia* (porpoise teeth). The *fonoa* (the name of this type of gift) was given.

On the appointed day, the two parties came together, and exchanged their gifts with each other. Before the gifts were exchanged, the *wane-inoto* from each party made deep apologies for dishonouring and killing each other either by sorcery or by weapons. Then gifts were exchanged, as the traditional means of forgiveness and reconciliation. After the exchange, the hatred ended.⁹

Case Study Two. The second case study from Hogbin's book concerns a man named Aninali, and Molia, the *wane-inoto* of Alilo. Alilo is below the present Malu'u station. Molia, who was believed to be a sorcerer, made sorcery on Aninali's father, who died. Later on, Aninali, with four of his men, planned a raid on the suspected person. Their plan was successful, and they killed Molia.

After an interval of about two years, he inquired as to whether the *wane-inoto* of Alilo could accept the *fonoa*. The Alilo *wane-inoto* accepted that there should be some sort of peace settlement for the problem that had been unresolved. The usual value of the *fonoa* was agreed upon by both parties.

The day came for this presentation. The relatives of both parties came to the prearranged place for the presentation. The two *wane-inotos* sat down together, before the actual exchanging of the gifts. After this, the two *wane-inoto* stood up and exchanged betel nuts. This signified their mutual trust. When this was done, both parties exchanged their gifts, as a mark of forgiveness and reconciliation. The relationship was restored.¹⁰

⁹ Ibid., p. 92.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 93.

Exchanges After Tribal Fighting

Tribal fighting in Toabaita was always a difficult case to handle. People on both sides lived in fear of death from each other, even after the fighting was over. They believed that, although the fighting had stopped, the sorcerers would still perform spells on their enemies, so people still suffered death, even after the tribal fighting was over. In order to quickly put an end to the situation, someone had to step into the gap created between the two groups. This person was seen as the *wane-inoto*. In this context, the term *wane-inoto* takes on a new meaning. The word *wane* means “man” and the term *inoto* means “mediator”.

For the *wane-inoto* to bring forgiveness and reconciliation between the two fighting tribes, he had to have some traditional status. For example, he had to have some relationship ties with the two groups. He had to be prepared to offer a large amount of goods from his treasure. He must not be seen among the fighting folk. In other words, the *wane-inoto* was the peacemaker.

Case Study Three. Hogbin has also written an account of a tribal fight between the Ainigaule and the Uala tribes. Both the Uala and Ainigaule are in the same Malu’u area of Toabaita.

The trouble began when some youths from Uala stole a pig belonging to a man from Ainigaule. He retaliated in a drastic way by burning the men’s house. He died shortly afterwards, whereupon the father of one of the youths, who owned the house, was proven guilty of sorcery and murder. The two groups then mustered their forces, and met in a pitched battle, in which four men were killed, two on each side, and many were wounded. Eventually, a *wane-inoto* from another district, who had both Uala and Ainigaule ancestors, intervened and arranged a peacemaking ceremony, in which each side gave the other 20 pigs and *tafuliae* (traditional shell money).

Exchange of these gifts was a token of forgiveness and reconciliation from both sides. True traditional forgiveness had to be expressed by both sides. Reconciliation was never recognised if only one party was

involved. The purpose was not to satisfy the demands of the other group, but to put an end to the conflict, and to restore relationships.¹¹

Exchanges After Conflict Between Families

A dispute between families often led to serious divisions in the tribe, if it was not dealt with quickly. In this section, we will look at another case study from Hogbin's book. This particular case study was between two elderly men in the Uala tribe, Foakambara and Konofilia. I am closely related to them: Konofilia was my mother's uncle.

Case Study Four. Foakambara killed a pig belonging to Konofilia, and later, Konofilia demanded compensation for his pig. However, Foakambara refused to give in to the demand, and asked Konofilia to meet the cost of the vegetables destroyed by the pig. On the refusal of his request, Konofilia sent his nephew to kill one of Foakambara's pigs in revenge.

The problem began to grow worse and the two parties were prepared for battle. Before anything happened, a woman ran with the news to the *wane-inoto*. Without asking any further questions, he sent two of his *ramos*, "warriors", to the scene, so they stopped the men from fighting. They all went back home quietly, and, some days later, the *wane-inoto* came and made Foakambara and Konofilia exchange an equal number of *tafuliae*, "shell money", and other valuables, as a sign of forgiveness and reconciliation.¹²

TRADITIONAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN EXCHANGE AND COMPENSATION IN TOABAITAN CULTURE

In this section on forgiveness and compensation, I want to refer back to our Toabaitan understanding of the two local terms, *manatalubea* and *fa'abua*. Although it may be thought that these terms are related to each other, in our Toabaitan culture, these terms are quite different.

The local term *manatalubea* derives its meaning from *manata*, which means "the mind or the thought from the heart". *Lubea* means "to be

¹¹ Ibid., p. 94.

¹² Ibid., p. 78.

no longer bound by the offence”, which implies that the person now is a free man. In regards to a typical exchange of gifts, the *manatalubea*, “forgiveness”, is done by both parties.

The word *fa'abua*, “compensation”, has three basic meanings:

- (a) Restoring honour to the one dishonoured.
- (b) Satisfying the mind of the offended.
- (c) The method used to restore peace quickly.

In summary, compensation is aimed at restoring the relationship between the offended and the offender.

The following section will bring out three main points that will clarify this issue of compensation: obligation in compensation, weakness in compensation, and strengths of compensation.

OBLIGATION TO PROVIDE COMPENSATION

In traditional Toabaitan culture, compensation is also another method used for restoring peace. This method is different from the exchange method. As has been mentioned, exchange is aimed at restoring peace between two parties. But, in the case of compensation, the offender is not working at restoring the relationship. His main aim is to satisfy the mind of the offended, in regards to the offence committed. The offender is obligated to meet the demands of the compensation. He has no choice but to meet the requirements.

Case Study Five. This case study will clarify the obligation to provide compensation. A young man had sexual intercourse with the daughter of the village chief. The girl's father found out about this incident later. He was angered, and, without any delay, he went to the young man's father, and demanded compensation to be paid within one day.

The young man's father did not have the means to pay the compensation, but, because he was obligated to pay, he had to find the money. He went to one of his close relatives to borrow money from them in order to pay the compensation. The young man's father got

the money (traditional *tafuliae*), and gave it to the girl's father the next day.

The compensation payment was not just the responsibility of the father of the young man, but of the extended family as well. Just to make it clear, the borrowing of money, mentioned above, was done by the traditional method: if a close relative runs into a problem, which will demand a compensation payment, the young man's family is obligated to help. In summary, the offender has a very strong obligation to meet the demands of the offended.

WEAKNESSES OF THE COMPENSATION METHOD

Compensation is not done on the basis of agreement, but the offender is forced into the compensation payment. Also, the compensation gift can be rejected, when the value of the gift is considered poor or low. Also, there can be a false acceptance of the compensation from the hands of the offender. This may not change the offended one's heart. He may demand pay back later, or he may inflate the compensation payment to satisfy his greed. The following are two case studies to demonstrate the weaknesses in compensation. Although the first case study is from Papua New Guinea, it demonstrates compensation practices within Melanesian countries.

Case Study Six. In June, 1987, I was invited to speak at a pastor's seminar at Nipa (Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea) with the Tiliba Christian church. During that time, two tribes from nearby villages were arranging for a payment of compensation over a death of a child, who was believed to have been killed by one of the men from the offender's tribe. The offended tribe demanded 100 pigs and K10,000. When the day came for the compensation to be given to all the people, I was there.

The offenders came with the full compensation payment, and the full number of pigs. When it was given to the offended family, they did not accept it. They were not happy with the size of the pigs. That day, a tribal fight broke out, because of the size of the compensation payment.

Case Study Seven. A son of a *wane-inoto* was involved in adultery with another man's wife. The husband of the adulteress was really angry against the son of this *wane-inoto*. The adulterer hid in a cave in the bush for some time. Later on, when the husband's anger had had time to cool down, the father, *wane-inoto*, offered him 25 *tafuliae*, red shell money, and several pigs, to compensate for what his son had done. The father of this young man was obligated to give the compensation, *fa'abua* or *fa'a-lea*. After these had been accepted, the adulterer began to appear in public once more, though he always took the greatest care to avoid the man he had wronged. If the adulterer ran into the man he had wronged, this man could have retaliated against him, and could have killed him.

Compensation was not very effective, and did not settle the problem for either party, so the incompleteness of compensation, as a means of forgiveness, stands out clearly here. Although the compensation is given to the offended, to solve the problem fully, they have to go back to the traditional exchanging system, and sacrificial methods, to really heal the deep ill-feeling, and restore relationships again with the opposing group.¹³

STRENGTHS OF THE COMPENSATION METHOD

Although compensation is an incomplete means of forgiveness and reconciliation, it has its strengths. The first strength is that compensation, when fully accepted by the offended party, restores peace. For example, when an offence deserving death has been committed, the full acceptance of the *tafuliae* by the offended party secures and protects the life of the offender. The second strength is that compensation restores honour and respect to the offended. It is a way of rebuilding the character of the offended. A third strength is that payment of compensation is a form of traditional discipline. In other words, the demand for compensation improves the character of the offender. Compensation teaches them a lesson, so that they will not get into the habit of committing crime. A fourth strength is that, ideally, it satisfies the offended party. A fifth strength is the building of unity between families. Compensation is never an individual

¹³ Ibid., pp. 79-90.

matter. It always gathers the families together to share in the issues. It is like bearing one another's burdens. It makes one feel responsible for the other, and provides opportunity to get them out of terrible situations.

Case Study Eight. One man killed another man from his village in an argument. The relatives of the victim hunted for the other man. This man had to run away from his own home to another area to save his life. When he arrived in another village, he was taken into the *biu'u*, "men's house". Upon entering the men's house, the chief of the village welcomed him. The murderer told the chief what happened, and the reason he was running away.

After the chief heard the story, he stood up, got two *tafuliea*, a pig, and a band of his men, and took the compensation to the victim's tribe. When they arrived, the chief went to the victim's family, and offered them the gift. When the people of the dead man received the gift, they made a promise to the chief not to take the life of the murderer.

THE TRADITIONAL MEDIATOR: *WANE-INOTO'O*

In traditional Toabaitan society, the mediator plays an important role in the community. He is known as the *wane-inoto'o*. The term *wane-inoto* has a different meaning from *wane-inoto'o*. *Wane-inoto* means "rich man" or "wealthy person". The term *wane-inoto'o* means the "middle man" or "mediator". When there is an argument between two brother clans, a *wane-inoto'o* is always called upon to calm down the angry men, and help them reconcile. His main job is to make peace.

The Nature of the Wane-Inoto'o

The *wane-inoto'o* is an important person in the community, in the sense of his wealth and openness to help in times of trouble. His ministry, as a mediator, is also extended beyond his own tribe or clan. When a person from another tribe or clan is involved in serious trouble, which may deserve death, the *wane-inoto'o* is prepared to offer help to the offender, if he runs into the *biu'u*. Whenever a person is in trouble, and is chased, the moment he runs into the house of the *wane-inoto'o*, he is safe, regardless of what clan or tribe he comes

from. The mediator will wait for the offender's enemies, not to pay back, but to offer them a gift, known in Toabaita as *rete malefota*.

This gift is understood to be a ransom for the offender's life. The offender is now a free person. He has the right to be treated as a son of the *wane-inoto'o*. He is free from harm by the enemy tribe. He is not bound to his new family, but he is also free to go back to his own people. The offender's life is secure. Any person, who intends to kill or hang him, will be in great trouble for not honouring and respecting the *malefota*, which the *wane-inoto'o* gives. There are many things that are tied to this gift: peace, unity, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Within the exchange system, the *wane-inoto'o* is the initiator of this method, and he is the one who brings about reconciliation. Without the mediating ministry of the *wane-inoto'o*, there would be many unsolved problems in the community. Every tribe in the Toabaitan area must have a *wane-inoto'o*. His service has nothing to do with the spirits; rather he depends entirely on his wealth, to bring peace, or to settle conflicts. The authority of his service comes from his treasury. He relies heavily on his riches to meet the urgent needs.

One good example is the case study between Foakambara and Konofilia, quoted earlier in this paper. Here we saw the *wane-inoto'o* of Uala tribe step in and stop the fight. Later on, Foakambara and Konofilia were reconciled by exchanging goods, as ordered by the *wane-inoto'o* of Uala.

Case Study Nine. A man had a sexual affair with a girl. This man was an orphan, a *wela-inomal*, who had, some years before, attached himself to the girl's father. Therefore, the girl's relatives decided to take the life of this *wela-inomal*. The father came into the village, and started shouting out threats. However, the *wane-inoto* came and took the girl's father to his house, where food was served. Subsequently, three *tafuliae*, and three pigs were given as compensation for the girl's pregnancy. Here, the *wane-inoto* acted again as a mediator between the *wela-inomal* and the father of the girl.

Case Study Ten. In another case, a young man's settlement was actually attacked before compensation was accepted. Adequate preparations for defence had been made, and a number of his relatives were ready to fight. Before blood was shed, one of the older men, who was believed to be the *wane-inoto*, came forward and offered one *tafuliae* and pigs to cool the attacker's anger. This brought peace to the situation.

It is necessary to clarify one point that might cause confusion to the reader. The *wane-inoto*, "rich person", is the same person who becomes the *wane-inoto'o*, "mediator", because of his wealth.

After going through these case studies, we see clearly who the traditional mediator really was. He was a man of courage, wealth, and of great importance in the community. His wealth made him brave, and he was ready to act, when the situation was tense. He was a well-respected person in the community.¹⁴

EXCHANGE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The exchange of gifts in Toabaitan culture is for the purpose of forgiveness, and restoration of broken relationships. This practice contributed a lot to the unity of the group. In this part, we will explore gift exchanges, in Hebrew culture, to see whether there are similarities between Toabaitan and Hebrew culture.

THE GIFT EXCHANGE BETWEEN JACOB AND ESAU

We know very well the account of Jacob and Esau, and how they became enemies, after Jacob deceived his father. Jacob then fled to Mesopotamia, the land of his uncle Laban, because Esau was planning to kill him. He went to Mesopotamia, and settled there with his uncle, and he later married two of his uncle's daughters, Leah and Rachel. Jacob stayed there for 20 years, serving 14 of those for the bride-price of his two wives (Gen 29:20-27).

As his family continued to grow, he had a problem with his father-in-law: "The sons of Laban said, Jacob has taken everything our father

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 91.

owned, and has gained all his wealth from what belonged to our father” (Gen 31:1-2). So Jacob was looking for a way to escape from Laban. However, he still had an unsolved problem with his brother, which he had caused 20 years earlier. He knew he had to go back to his own land, but would Esau accept him?

As a good Hebrew, Jacob knew the traditional way of dealing with his problem with his brother. He followed the ritual prescribed in his Hebrew culture to solve the conflict. The only way to overcome Esau’s anger was to offer him a present. Offering presents was the traditional way to resolve broken relationships (Gen 32:14-15; 33:1-15).

Jacob prepared an enormous gift of great value for his brother. The purpose of this present was to restore brotherly love. The present consisted of 200 female goats, 20 male goats, 200 ewes, 20 rams, 30 female camels, with their young, 40 cows, 10 bulls, 20 female donkeys, and 10 male donkeys. With difficulty, Esau accepted the gift, and, in exchange, he offered some of his men to Jacob. The acceptance of the gift, of the person seeking reconciliation, was the surest proof that all was well.¹⁵

In conclusion, brotherly fellowship was restored, since the gift was accepted. Forgiveness occurred when the gift was accepted, and, from that point on, the relationship was now restored.

THE GIFT OFFERED TO DAVID BY NABAL’S WIFE

1 Sam 25:4-35 speaks about an incident that happened between David, his men, and Nabal. The Bible tells us that David sent ten of his young men, with orders to go to Carmel to find Nabal, and give him his greetings, as well as a message. Nabal was a wealthy, but wicked, landowner.

After passing on the message, Nabal did not accept David’s message. David’s ten young men went back, without anything given to them.

¹⁵ H. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, vol 2, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1942, p. 2:889.

After arriving back, they told David about their trip, and how Nabal had treated David's message.

Nabal's response to this particular message caused David to form an army of 400 footmen to secretly march against Nabal. A concerned servant came and told Nabal's wife, Abigail, about David's secret plan. To save the situation, urgent action was needed. Abigail was a strong woman, who knew the appropriate Hebrew cultural response (1 Sam 25:4-35). She took action, which might be regarded in Melanesia as men's work, by preparing an enormous gift to take to the angry David, and his men, in order that she might save the situation. The gift was made up of 200 loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, five seahs of roasted grain, 100 cakes of raisins, and 200 cakes of pressed figs.

As she was riding up the road with her present, she saw David and his men coming down the hill. She quickly dismounted, and threw herself on the ground at David's feet, and began to explain the situation. Then she asked David to accept the gift, and share it with his men. She also pleaded for forgiveness from David, and later she asked David to remember her, when he became king.

In response, David praised the Lord God of Israel for what He had done. He also thanked Abigail for her sensible action, through which God saved the situation. David thanked her again for saving him from the crime of murder, and for keeping him from trouble.

In 1 Sam 25:35, David accepted the gift from Abigail, assuring her of a peace treaty, which was signed, through the gift offered. The acceptance of the gift was the outward sign of the reconciliation, expressed in David's word.¹⁶

Exchanging of gifts plays an important role in both Melanesian and Hebrew cultures. They restore relationships that are difficult to solve. In other words, a gift is a token of a peace settlement. The acceptance of the gift demonstrates forgiveness and peace in any situation.

¹⁶ Peter Ackroyd, *The First Book of Samuel*, Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1971, p. 199.

COMPENSATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament law supports the necessity of compensation. There are two scripture passages that should be looked at. They are Ex 22:16-17 and Deut 22:28-29.

Ex 22:16-17 says, “If a man seduces a virgin, who is not betrothed, and lies with her, he shall give the marriage present for her, and make her his wife. If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money equivalent to the marriage present for a virgin” (RSV).

“Some scholars consider this as being originally the price paid to the father for the bride, but this is not certain. At this time it was considered compensation.”¹⁷

Secondly, Deut 22:28-29 says, “If a man meets a virgin, who is not betrothed, and seizes her and lies with her, he shall give to the father of the young woman 50 shekels of silver” (RSV). Therefore, when a man uses force on an unbetrothed virgin, he must pay damages to the father.¹⁸ This practice of compensation in the Old Testament is similar to one in Toabaitan culture. According to Toabaitan culture, when a young man is found having practised fornication with another man’s daughter, he is obligated to pay compensation to the father. The purpose of this compensation is to restore honour to the father of the young woman. The normal compensation price in Toabaita is one *tafuliae*, “red shell money”, and a pig.

From Ex 22:16-17 and Deut 22:28-29, we see the importance of compensation. These passages point out that an offender could not escape compensation for the harm committed. Other passages, such as Num 5:5-8; Lev 6:1-7; and Ex 22:1-5, offer more evidence.

One scholar, commenting on Num 5:5-8, states, “This section calls for the righting of wrongs within the community, the kind of wrong, in which damage has been done, and loss sustained. Confession, full

¹⁷ Philip Hyatt, *Exodus*, New Century Bible Commentary, London UK: Oliphants, 1971, p. 240.

¹⁸ P. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1976, p. 295.

restitution, and additional payment of 20 percent is required of the guilty party.”¹⁹ Although confession of sin was made through sacrifice, the full compensation, or restitution, plus 20 percent, was still required of the guilty party.

The final point to be made is that confession of sin to God, or even offering of sacrifice for the sin committed, does not do away with the need to compensate a man for the damage done.

COMPENSATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, AND SOME CONCLUSIONS REGARDING APPLICATION TO TOABAITAN CULTURE

The New Testament does not give explicit teaching on exchange as was seen in the Old Testament. However, in the case of compensation it does give evidence on the subject.

ZACCHEUS (LUKE 19)

As a result of his conversion, Zaccheus demonstrated his willingness to make restitution: “If I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay him four times the amount” (Luke 19:8). Under the law, only if the robbery was deliberate, or there was a violent act of destruction, was a four-fold restitution necessary (Ex 22:1). If it had been ordinary robbery, and the original goods were not restorable, then double the value had to be paid (Ex 22:4, 7). If voluntary confession was made, and voluntary restitution offered, then the value of the original goods had to be paid, plus one-fifth (Lev 6:5; Num 5:7). Zaccheus determined to do far more than the law demanded. He showed, by his deeds, that he was a changed man.”²⁰

PAUL AND PHILEMON

A second case involved Paul, and his relationship with Philemon and Onesimus. Philemon was a Christian slave owner, who owned a slave named Onesimus. Onesimus had run away from Philemon to Rome. It

¹⁹ Philip Budd, *Numbers*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol 5, Waco TX: Word Books, 1984, p. 5:58.

²⁰ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, Edinburgh UK: The Saint Andrew Press, 1965, pp. 244-245.

seems he had stolen from his master. He had been caught, and put in prison. There, he had met Paul, who later led him to the Lord. Paul cared for him, and continued to nurture him in the faith. Paul sent Onesimus back to his own master. He asked Philemon to accept Onesimus back, not as a slave, but as a brother. In Philem 18, Paul offers to make restitution on behalf of Onesimus. The apostle not only asked for forgiveness for Onesimus, but he also offered compensation for the wrong done.²¹

As a Christian, and as a Hebrew, Paul was ready to fulfil his cultural responsibilities. He did not think it inappropriate to pay compensation to Philemon, as an expression of reconciliation and forgiveness, and damages lost. Paul says flatly in Philem 19, "I will repay it."

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN TOABAITAN AND HEBREW CULTURE

Before looking at the similarities between Toabaitan and Hebrew culture, it is necessary to underscore where the Hebrew people got their idea of compensation and restitution. Num 5:5-7 tells us that God Himself gave this command to Moses, "The Lord said to Moses, 'Say to the Israelites: When a man or a woman wrongs another in any way, and so is unfaithful to the Lord, that person is guilty, and must confess the sin he committed. He must make full restitution for his wrong, add one-fifth to it, and give it all to the person he has wronged.' "

God, Himself, initiated the custom of compensation, or restitution. But compensation cannot stand alone. The Bible says that the guilty person must confess his sins, then make full restitution. Toabaitan culture is the same. When a sin or offence is committed, the person has to go to the priest for confession.

For example, if a young man committed fornication with another man's daughter in the community, that young man had to go to the priest, and confess the wrongs committed, before he could make a compensation payment to the offended. The same practice was also followed in the exchange of gifts. Before the exchange would take

²¹ Jac Muller, *The Epistles of Paul to the Philippians and to Philemon*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1967, p. 188.

place, the priest had to offer a sacrifice on behalf of the offender and the offended. This sacrifice was for confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation. After having done that, the two groups were ready to exchange gifts.

COMPENSATION SHOULD NOT BE DONE AWAY WITH

Compensation should not be done away with, because it has a role to play in bringing peace and reconciliation in today's Toabaitan culture. The Bible does not teach against compensation.

As we saw in the Old Testament, this practice of compensation or restitution was a command from God. The New Testament shows us that compensation is still applicable. Jesus did not stop Zaccheus from making full compensation. Zaccheus did what was right, according to his cultural mandate (Num 5:5-8). Another example is from Paul and Philemon. Here, Paul became the initiator of a compensation payment between Philemon and Onesimus. Paul was an apostle, yet still faithful to the demands of his culture. He was prepared to pay compensation on behalf of his brother Onesimus.

From these biblical examples, we will see that compensation and exchange is still appropriate for a Toabaitan Christian, and should not be done away with.

THE ROLE OF MEDIATOR: THE PASTOR AS *WANE-INOTO'O*

As pointed out earlier, the traditional mediator had an important role to play in the culture. He was known as the go-between person. He was the initiator, or negotiator, for exchange and compensation between the conflicting parties. However, this ministry has been taken over by the pastor. The pastor is always called upon, when there is conflict in the community between tribes or individuals. The pastor has become the go between person, instead of the traditional *wane-inoto'o*.

Now, the Toabaitan people see the pastor as their new *wane-inoto'o*, who always helps them to restore their broken relationships, by counselling and praying with the conflicting parties.

However, he does not fully perform the cultural demands. For example, he does not encourage the offender to pay compensation to the offended. The pastor's role should be seen as one, who initiates or negotiates for exchange and compensation, between conflicting parties.

To make this point clearer, the following case study is offered, out of my own experience as a pastor of a local congregation, known as New Mala in the Western Solomons of the Solomon Islands.

Case Study 11. One day, two members of my congregation had an argument, which ended in a fight. During the fight, I stepped in to stop it. Both men stopped. I went between these men, and brought them together. I had a talk with them, and they both agreed to be reconciled with each other. I called for a fellowship meal to be organised by the congregation. In this fellowship meal, the two members apologised to each other, and prayed together. The final thing before the meal started, the offender who had caused the fight, and had caused a lot of harm to the other man's body, made a compensation payment, before they ate the fellowship meal. I felt it was right for the man, who caused bodily harm, to make compensation to his fellow brother.

PREVIOUS MISSIONARY ATTITUDES TOWARDS TRADITIONAL TOABAITAN EXCHANGE AND COMPENSATION METHODS

Our people, to maintain and restore peace and unity, used traditional methods of exchange and compensation, before white missionaries came to the Toabaitan area. To summarise briefly:

1. Compensation was a gift given quickly by the offender to make up for the loss or damage done to the offended.
2. The exchange methods were gifts exchanged between the opposing parties based on agreement.

I believe these two methods were “hooks”, created by God, in our culture, on which the gospel could “hang”. They prepared us for the gospel. However, the missionaries did not see these created hooks. When the missionaries first came, they brought with them the gospel of Jesus Christ. Their main aim was to evangelise, and teach people how to live the Christian life. Their teaching emphasised separation from

our old ways. That meant a Christian man or woman must be different from other non-Christians. This separation was not to take place only in the heart, but it also affected us socially – new Christian villages were created.

There were two reasons for creating these new villages:

1. They were a place where they could teach the people about the new Christian culture and doctrine.
2. They moved us away from the old culture; the traditional culture, which they felt was connected with the worship of the spirits. To do away with these old cultural values, they passed church rules to bring the people from holding on to the old, traditional values.

Because of this separation, many of our important cultural values were lost, including exchange and compensation. The missionaries thought that compensation was of the past, and considered it evil. They enforced church rules that forbade Christians from accepting compensation from the hands of their offenders.

There were three reasons that supported their argument for not allowing Christians to accept compensation:

1. They felt that compensation was a reward for an act of sin. Here is an example: X's son committed fornication with Z's daughter, but X's people gave compensation to Z's people. Because Z is a Christian, and he had accepted the compensation, the church had to put him under discipline for accepting the compensation. The missionaries thought that the gift given to the offended was making money from sin committed.
2. They felt that prayer was to play the central role in the act of forgiveness and reconciliation. Prayer had taken the place of exchange and compensation. The opposing parties could deal with relationship problems only through prayer. Prayer together, not exchange or compensation,

was the symbol, which stated the conflict had been resolved.

3. The third reason why missionaries forbade compensation was because of a particular understanding of the cross, in the atonement. The main focus was on the finished work of Christ on the cross. In other words, Christ was seen to have offered the final compensation between God and man, and, therefore, if anyone accepted compensation, he was denying the sufficiency of Christ's compensation.

CONTEXTUALISATION

This section will deal with four important areas:

1. Definition of contextualisation
2. God's preparation of Toabaitan culture
3. Rejection of contextualisation
4. Critical contextualisation

DEFINITION OF CONTEXTUALISATION

According to the Christian anthropologist Paul Hiebert, "We refer to this process of translating the gospel into a culture, so that the person understands it, and responds to it, as indigenisation or contextualisation."²² He further states, "All cultures can adequately serve as vehicles for the communication of the gospel. If this were not so, people would have to change cultures to become Christians. This does not mean that the gospel is fully understood in any culture, but that all people can learn enough to be saved, and to grow in faith within the context of their own culture."²³

Without the contextualisation of the gospel, our people will treat the gospel as foreign.

²² Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1977, p. 54.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

GOD'S PREPARATION OF TOABAITAN CULTURE

God, indeed, has prepared the Toabaitan culture for His message of forgiveness and reconciliation. When looking at various cultural values in Toabaita, particularly exchange and compensation, we can see that these two values point to the true meaning of God's message of forgiveness, reconciliation, and peace. The entire purpose of exchange and compensation is for peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation among conflicting parties in the community.

The Toabaitan people did not have any problem in understanding the message of God's forgiveness and reconciliation, but they had a problem in accepting that message of reconciliation outside of the cultural values of Toabaitan culture. They rejected the traditional way of doing forgiveness and reconciliation. They did not make use of the "hooks", which God had prepared for them to use, when presenting the gospel.

Case Study 12. This case study was taken from Don Richardson's book, Peace Child. Richardson was a missionary among the Sawi people in Irian Jaya. The Sawi people had a strong traditional Melanesian method of doing forgiveness and reconciliation that was unique to them.

Two Sawi tribes (Kamur and Heman) collided in a tribal fight. This tribal fight ended in many lives being lost, and some were wounded. The fight continued for some time. On the day of declaring peace, both parties waited on each other as to who would be the first to step down to declare peace. From the Kamur tribe came a man named Kaiyo. In his arms he carried a six-month-old baby boy, who was the peace child. He was to hand this child to the enemy tribe. When the other tribe saw that action, they waited patiently to receive this gift of peace.

On receiving the peace child, the Heman exchanged a child from their tribe with the Kamur tribe. The Sawi people believed that the exchanging of children was a sign of mutual trust between the two tribes. Apart from exchanging children, they also exchanged bows and arrows, and other valuable goods, plus the exchanging of tribal names.

All these exchanges took place during a celebration of the peace and reconciliation ceremony.²⁴

Richardson used the cultural method of the peace child to share God's message of peace. He then told them of God's peace child – Jesus Christ. Richardson talked with one of the men, who had given his son as a peace child. “Did you give another man's son or your own son?” In reply, the man said, “I gave my own son.” “So did God,” exclaimed Richardson. “The child you gave to the other tribe was no cast-off, you wanted to get rid of. He was your beloved son. But the Son of God gave an even more beloved.” The man responded to Richardson, “I understand.”²⁵

We see in this example a missionary who respected the culture of the people, and presented the gospel through the cultural channels, which God had prepared.

REJECTION OF CONTEXTUALISATION

The early missionaries, who came to Toabaita, did not fully contextualise the gospel into our culture. They rejected the culture of the Toabaitan people, and replaced it with their own culture. They thought that Toabaitan culture was evil. The early missionaries told us that, when we became Christians, we must leave our old heathen villages, and move down to the coast to a newly-established Christian village.

The new Christian villages were where the new Christian culture was introduced, and where the old Toabaitan cultural values were rejected, including compensation and exchange.

What was accepted were Toabaitan moral codes, however, anything, apart from that, was rejected. The Toabaitan Christians were not given the freedom to make decisions regarding exchange and compensation. If they had, they would have preserved these two particular cultural values.

²⁴ Don Richardson, *Peace Child*, Ventura CA: Regal Books, 1974, pp. 193-206.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

THE PROCESS OF CONTEXTUALISATION

Hiebert sees three approaches concerning contextualisation:²⁶

1. Denial of the old: rejection of contextualisation
2. Dealing with the old: critical contextualisation
3. Acceptance of the old: uncritical contextualisation

The first approach deals with the way the missionaries treated our traditional Toabaitan culture. They denied the old culture. The result was that the gospel remained foreign, and rarely accepted, and the old was hidden, which later resulted in syncretism.

The second approach deals with the old, with a real desire to see the gospel contextualised. This is gathering information about the old culture, studying the biblical teachings about the issue, and then evaluating the old culture, in the light of the biblical teaching. Then, after all this, a new contextualised Christian practice is created. The culture is accepted and challenged, in light of scripture.

The third approach is an uncritical acceptance of the old culture. It shows that there are some, who quickly accept the culture without thinking – a practice which results in syncretism. This is a point of warning not to accept everything in the culture, because there are things in the culture, which go against the scriptures.

CRITICAL CONTEXTUALISATION

What should Christian converts do about their cultural heritage? Hiebert suggests his second approach – critical contextualisation.²⁷ Old beliefs and customs are neither rejected nor accepted without examination. “They are first studied with regard to the meanings and places they have within their cultural setting and then evaluated in the light of biblical norms.”²⁸

²⁶ Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, pp. 184-188.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

How does this take place? Firstly, an individual or church must recognise the need to deal biblically with all areas of life. This awareness may arise when a new church is faced with births, marriages, or death, and must decide what Christian birth rites, weddings, or funerals should be like. Or it may emerge as people in the church recognise the need to examine certain other culturally-based customs. . . .

Secondly, local church leaders, and the missionary, must lead the congregation in *uncritically* gathering and analysing the traditional customs associated with the question at hand. For example, in dealing with funeral rites, the people should analyse their traditional rites – first describing each song, dance, recitation, and rite that makes up the ceremony, and then discussing its meaning and function, within the overall ritual. The purpose here is to understand the old ways, not to evaluate them. . . .

In the third step, the pastor or missionary should lead the church in a Bible study, related to the question under consideration. . . . This is a crucial step, for, if the people do not clearly understand and accept the biblical teachings, they will be unable to deal with their cultural past. . . . It is important, however, that the congregation be actively involved in the study and interpretation of scripture, so that they will grow in their own abilities to discern the truth.

The fourth step is for the congregation to critically evaluate their own past customs, in the light of their new biblical understandings, and to make a decision regarding their use. It is important, here, that the people, themselves, make the decision, for they must be sure of the outcome, before they will change. . . . To involve the people in evaluating their own culture draws upon their strength. They know their old culture better than the missionary, and are in a better position to critique it, once they

have biblical instruction. Moreover, they will grow spiritually by learning to apply scriptural teachings to their own lives.²⁹

SUMMARY OF CONTEXTUALISATION PROCESS

What the South Seas Evangelical church (SSEC) needs today is this process of critical contextualisation to be initiated. Firstly, it needs to gather information about the old traditions from the people, and it needs to prepare biblical teaching material, which addresses the situation. Then, later on, it should organise seminars, which evaluate the old cultural values, in light of the Bible. Then it should develop a new contextualised Christian practice, particularly in the areas, in which church rules conflict with the culture. At the moment, critical contextualisation is an untouched process within the SSEC.

RECOMMENDATION TO THE SSEC

I would like to make recommendations to the SSEC regarding the following four issues:

1. Exchange and compensation
2. The role of pastor as mediator
3. Church attitudes toward cultural values
4. The initiation of critical contextualisation within the SSEC

EXCHANGE AND COMPENSATION

I would like to recommend that the church recognise the value of traditional exchange and compensation, as an important means of demonstrating to the community the reality of reconciliation. After two parties have been helped to reconcile, by the church, they should share a fellowship meal together. During this time, they should pray, and share with one another. At the same time, they should be encouraged to give and accept compensation, and to exchange traditional gifts. Personal restoration of hearts should be made public

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 186-187.

again. In other words, there should be a public and symbolic demonstration of reconciliation.

THE ROLE OF PASTOR AS MEDIATOR

The church should recognise the pastor's ministry, not only as a shepherd of the flock, but also as a mediator. They should endorse his involvement in issues facing the community, especially in cultural matters. For example, if one man wrongs another man, the pastor should become the initiator and negotiator for compensation payment and exchange. He should be allowed to deal with conflicts. They should not limit his ministry to the pulpit. That is to say, they should not confine him to "spiritual matters", but he must be allowed to deal with cultural conflict as such.

CHURCH ATTITUDES TOWARD CULTURAL VALUES

The church should recognise and appreciate the importance of their traditions, and heritage, and cultural values. It would be good for the church to review its old church rules, which conflict with cultural values. And they should make changes to the rules, which conflict with the culture, but which remain biblical, especially in the areas of exchange and compensation.

THE INITIATION OF CRITICAL CONTEXTUALISATION WITHIN THE SSEC

The church should ask the Bible schools and Bible colleges to conduct seminars that address the issue of critical contextualisation. Before those seminars are conducted, each Bible school and Bible college should assign their staff to different associations (district or region). That staff member should be sent, with the purpose of gathering information about the old culture, particularly, exchange and compensation. The staff member should study the biblical teachings about these things. During the seminars, the staff and students can evaluate the old, in the light of biblical teachings. Throughout that process, they may be able to create a new contextualised Christian practice in the area of exchange and compensation.

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