

# QUEST FOR SALVATION IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA: THE YANGORUAN CONTEXT

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## INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

### TRADITIONAL ROOT OF SALVATION

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

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<sup>2</sup> The Yangoruans live in the East Sepik Province of Papua New Guinea.

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

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

## **STILL SEARCHING FOR SALVATION**

Why are Yangoruans still searching for salvation, when it has been over 2,000 years since the birth of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world? And even worse, Papua New Guinea is a Christian, and modern, country, and the Yangoruans have been evangelised since 1912.<sup>4</sup> However, these questions should be treated with care. One may well say it's all part of their cargoist behaviour, as has been evidenced in history.<sup>5</sup> Another may say it's properly their culture, religion, politics, or economical ideology. These observations are true, in a sense, because they are avenues, through which salvation from different aspects of life was sought, but the main purpose was sustenance of life from poverty, and ill health, protection from evil cosmic powers, freedom from enslavement, and rescue from anything that may endanger life. On the other hand, the current religious strand also stands as a hallmark for continuous search. For instance, there is the current teaching, which divorces this-worldly and pragmatic blessings from the eternal blessings, the individual from society, and politics and economics from religion. This is promoting the ongoing search for holistic salvation. As missionaries, and their Yangoruan counterparts, keep teaching a salvation that concerns only individual human souls, devoid of

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

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

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

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

### **COMMUNAL NATURE OF SALVATION**

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

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

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

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

## FOCUS OF SALVATION

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

## BIBLICAL HISTORY OF SALVATION

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

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

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

## OLD TESTAMENT NARRATIVE

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>14</sup> Gen 1:26-27; 2:4-7.

<sup>15</sup> Gen 3:1-17.

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

### ***Communal Nature of Salvation***

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

### ***Focus of Salvation***

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

## **NEW TESTAMENT NARRATIVE**

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

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

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

<sup>18</sup> Harris, "Salvation", pp. 762-767.

<sup>19</sup> Marshall, "Salvation", p. 610.

<sup>20</sup> Arnold, "Salvation", p. 701.

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

### ***The New Dawn of Salvation***

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

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

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 702.

<sup>22</sup> Luke 4:18-19.

<sup>23</sup> John 10:10b.

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

### ***Communal Nature of Salvation***

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

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

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

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

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

### ***Focus of Salvation***

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

### **BIBLICAL ORIENTATION AND APPLICATION**

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

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

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

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

### COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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

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

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

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<sup>29</sup> Ps 68:19-20; Heb 2:10; 7:25.

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

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

the Yangoruan myth of the god-man, *Saii-Urin*, and the ancestral heritage, can be a type of the historical Jesus, the Saviour and Sustainer of whole life. A term used in Isaiah: “Emmanuel”, (God with us),<sup>32</sup> was later applied to Jesus, in the gospel of Matthew and in the gospel of John<sup>33</sup> Jesus declared to His disciples that He would be with them, through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Yangoruans can identify with “Emmanuel” as the *Saii-Urin* of history, through whom *Ye-Saii* dwelt among them.

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

## APPLICATION

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

“Come!  
Yangoruans come:

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<sup>32</sup> Is 7:10-17; 8:8; 9:1-7.

<sup>33</sup> Matt 1:20-23; John 14:15-23.

<sup>34</sup> Daimoi, “An Exploratory Missiological Study”, p. 8.

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

“Listen!!

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

“Rejoice!!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **CONCLUSION**

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

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<sup>42</sup> Matt 22:37-40.

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