

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

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INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WANTOK SYSTEM

WANTOK SYSTEM DEFINED

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

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

⁴ *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*.

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

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

MELANESIAN KINSHIP

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

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

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

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

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

TRADITIONAL MELANESIAN WANTOK SYSTEM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CONTEMPORARY WANTOK SYSTEM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Contemporary Wantok System – A Fertile Soil for Evil

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹² *Ibid.*, April 13, 2010.

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

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

EFFECTS OF THE *WANTOK* SYSTEM IN MELANESIA

Strengths

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

Weaknesses

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

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

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

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

WANTOK SYSTEM IN THE CHURCH

CASE STUDY: SOUTH SEA EVANGELICAL CHURCH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TOLERANCE OF SIN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DISCIPLINE

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

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

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

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

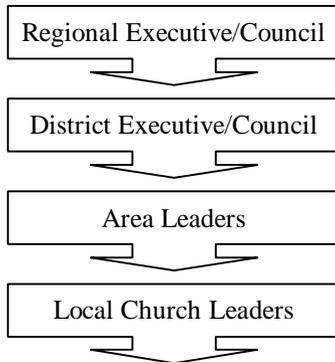


Figure 1: Level of church government and authority in SSEC PNG

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

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

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

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

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

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

DISCIPLESHIP

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

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

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

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

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

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

LEADERSHIP APPOINTMENTS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Strengths

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

Weaknesses

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

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

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

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

APPOINTMENTS FOR MINISTRIES AND TRAINING

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

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

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

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

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

EXPLORING WANTOK SYSTEM ISSUES IN THE BIBLE

WANTOK SYSTEM – AN ISSUE IN THE BIBLE

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

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

CASE STUDY

Jacob – Rebecca's Favourite

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

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

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

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

Joseph – Jacob's Favourite

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

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

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

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

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

EARLY CHURCH EVANGELISM

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

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

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

RECOMMENDATION – THE WAY TO MOVE FORWARD

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

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

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

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

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

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

SIN

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

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

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

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

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

DISCIPLESHIP – CENTRAL AIM

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

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

THE CHOOSING OF LEADERS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MINISTRY POSITIONS

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

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

CHURCH AS A NEW WANTOK COMMUNITY

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

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

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

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

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

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

APPLICATION

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

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

LESSONS TO LEARN

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

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

GENERAL APPLICATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

CONCLUSION

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

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

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

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