



Vol 32, Issue 2

2016

---

# MELANESIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

---

*Peer Reviewed Articles*

**Melanesian Morality and Biblical Virtues**

Kenneth Nehrbass

**Motifs of Death and Hell in the Teaching  
of Jesus: Part 1—An Examination of Hades**

Kim Papaioannou

**What About the *Wantok* System?**

Andrew Murray

*Summary Article*

**Evil and Human Suffering in View of God's Plan of  
Redemption in the Great Controversy Context**

Sussie Stanley

*Book Review*

Brandon Zimmerman

---

Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools

---



## EDITORIAL

There is an important lesson to be drawn from the first two articles in this second peer reviewed issue of the *Melanesian Journal of Theology*. If a credible scholarly argument is to be presented, the need for close attention to detail and even-handed treatment all of the evidence can hardly be overstated.

Kenneth Nehrbass draws on ten years of cross-cultural experience on Tanna Island in Vanuatu and thorough acquaintance with the local language to argue against the common anthropological assertion that animistic ethical reasoning is motivated only by pragmatic consideration of the social consequences of particular actions. He does not set out to show that Tannese ethics or morality correspond to or approximate classical, European, or biblical ethics or morality. Instead he uses ethical theories to “describe” the moral logic of Tannese society – with careful extension to Melanesian culture/s in general – even while comparing that logic with Christian theology. After discussing a number of Tannese moral obligations, he concludes that while moral discourse is related to discerning which moral failing brought about specific misfortunes, “actions like murder and stealing are bad ... because they are bad *a priori*.” A cogent discussion of how biblical theology can augment, refine, and correct Melanesian moral codes rounds out this stimulating study.

In the second contribution to this issue, Kim Papaioannou provides a much needed demonstration of how to approach a controversial theological topic. Leaving aside all polemic and the temptation to put forward one or two “proof-texts” that purport to “settle” the issue, he carefully examines a topic that has polarised evangelicals—eternal punishment in hell. In this first instalment of a two-part study, he surveys the meaning and use of the word *hades* in Greek literature, the Septuagint, and early Jewish literature, before focusing on the seven occurrences of the word in the New Testament apart from the gospels. Then, in the bulk of the study, he turns his attention to the four appearances of *hades* in the gospels. Here detailed exegesis of the primary (biblical) documents is combined with judicious analysis of the secondary literature. Even those predisposed to disagree will recognise the extraordinary importance of this subject for the spirit-filled animistic worldview.

In the third contribution by Andrew Murray the *wantok* system is considered from a perspective rarely if ever canvassed in this journal, classical Greek philosophy. Murray argues that Aristotelian political philosophy is “more sympathetic” to Melanesian culture than modern political theory because it views pre-political communities (families, villages, and clans) rather than the individual as the foundation of human society. In the face of enormous change the *wantok* system can seem anachronistic and amenable to corruption, nepotism, and other abuses. Nonetheless, it is so ingrained that Murray proposes “an extension of the deep communal relations that bind kinship groups to relations that bind the whole country.” In other words, *wantok* singularity must give way to *wantok* commonality (an idea already present in the semantic range of the word). Moreover, instead of simply imposing the modern nation state on communal cultures, ethical frameworks and economic practices suited to PNG nation-building should be developed and/or borrowed when they have been seen to have worked in other parts of the Pacific.

The merits of this proposal, a form of “philosophical contextualisation” if you will, are further examined by Brandon Zimmerman in a lengthy review, at the end of this issue, of the book from which Murray’s article comes.

This issue also features the second of what have been termed “summary articles.” Since the master’s thesis on which each summary article is based will have gone through an academic examination process, the resultant “article” has not been peer reviewed. It is a pleasure to publish for the first time the findings of a thesis in systematic theology. Sussie Stanley has done a commendable job of tackling a perennial issue amongst Christians: how can a God of love allow suffering?

Scott D. Charlesworth  
Editor