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Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools

Published by the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools (MATS), the *Melanesian Journal of Theology* was established to stimulate theological writing in Melanesia and to provide a scholarly forum for faculty and graduate students of the MATS member schools. Article submissions in the areas of applied theology, biblical studies, missiology, and theology are also invited from anyone with an interest in Melanesia and the wider South Pacific.

Melanesian Journal of Theology is committed to the discussion of Christian faith and practice within the context of Melanesian cultures. Article submissions of up to 8,000 words (including footnotes) should be sent to the editor. All submissions are subjected to a double-blind peer-review process involving the editorial board and other international experts, designed to ensure that published articles meet appropriate scholarly standards.

The opinions expressed in the articles published in this journal are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the editor or the member colleges of MATS. All articles have been edited to meet the requirements of the journal.

The journal is published annually. Papers may be submitted to the editor at any time for consideration.

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ABBREVIATIONS

(This list should be used for submission to the journal and will be expanded each year as required)

ACR	*Australasian Catholic Record*
AFER	*African Ecclesial Review*
AJMS	*Australian Journal of Mission Studies*
BBR	*Bulletin for Biblical Research*
BJRL	*Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library, Manchester*
CCL	Corpus Christianorum, series Latin
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
CTR	*Criswell Theological Review*
ERT	*Evangelical Review of Theology*
HJ	*Heythrop Journal*
ICC	International Critical Commentary
Int	*Interpretation*
IVPNTC	The IVP New Testament Commentary series
JAAR	*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JR	*Journal of Religion*
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement series
LCNT	Lenski's Commentary on the New Testament
MJT	*Melanesian Journal of Theology*
MTh	*Modern Theology*
NAC	New American Commentary series
NAMZ	*Neue Allgemeine Missions-Zeitschrift*
NIB	New Interpreter's Bible
NovT	*Novum Testamentum*

NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
PJT	*The Pacific Journal of Theology*
PL	Patrologia Latina
PNTC	The Pillar New Testament Commentary series
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SC	Sources Chrétiennes
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SOTSMS	Society for Old Testament Studies Monograph Series
TJ	*Trinity Journal*
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TS	*Theological Studies*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplement series
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WS	*Wiener Studien*
WTJ	*Wesleyan Theological Journal*

EDITORIAL

This is the second year of catching up the publication schedule of the journal. I am thankful to Tim Meadowcroft for all the initial work he had done in preparing this issue. I am most grateful to the authors for their patience and cooperation since I have taken over. I hope the final product is something that pleses them and is helpful to those engaged and interested in theology in Melanesia.

REPORT ON MATS 2020 CONFERENCE: THEOLOGY AND SOCIAL ISSUES IN MELANESIA

Editor: Due to the health regulations in place to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, the conference was postponed until 5–6 October, 2021, to be hosted by Pacific Adventist University, Port Moresby, in a virtual (Zoom) format.

NATURAL THEOLOGY AND THE DIFFERENT BODIES OF THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL*

Part 1: What is the Problem for which Natural Theology Seems a Solution?

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Abstract
In post-colonial contexts, the issues of cultural heritage and local embodiments of the faith drive much of the theological reflection and lived practice. One common starting point for this reflection lies in arguments for natural theology. That is, a legitimising rationale for contextual norms resides in a notion of creation as including a universal experience of the divine. Reference to natural theology is understood as providing a "point of contact" between a general knowledge of the divine and the particular revelation of God in Jesus Christ. In rejection of this position, the following argues that natural theology draws on similar forms of universalism that underlay the colonial endeavour and works against the development of local theologies. It illustrates this point by reference to German missions and how they, via a form of natural theology, considered local forms as necessary to the embodiment of the gospel itself. In affirming this, however, this mission theory came to affirm National Socialism as itself a form of cultural evangelisation. Precisely in reference to this need to develop local Christian theologies, natural theology fails to provide an adequate starting point.

Key Words
Natural theology, colonisation, contextualisation, creation, cultural heritage, point of contact, universality, Volk, cultural imperialism

Even though this essay addresses natural theology, it is not interested in the traditional ontological, cosmological, or teleological arguments for the existence of God.[1] It is, instead, interested in how natural theology has

* These two essays began as three lectures delivered to the Melanesian Association of Theological School annual conference on the topic of "natural theology." I am most grateful to MATS and its leaders for the invitation; to the hosts, Christian Leaders Training College, Maxon Mani, and William Longgar, for their encouragement; and to those who kept us all far too well fed for their generosity and hospitality. **Editor**: the second essay will appear in the next issue of *MJT*.

[1] For a good overview of these arguments, and the contemporary shifts in approach to natural

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appeared within mission circles, and especially in the attempts to establish a bridge between traditional religious and cultural heritage and the Christian faith. One common argument in this regard holds that God reveals Godself also in creation (Ps 19:1; Rom 1:20) and the human heart (Rom 2:14). Though this revelation is understood to be "non-salvific," it is universal and, in the words of Gordon Lewis, a "globally normative truth," one bound neither to time nor culture.[2] Natural theology points to universal norms ("Moses' law, is a school master to help fallen people realize their need for mercy and grace") and these norms prepare the ground for the hearing of "special revelation."[3]

One urgent task for Christian theology and the world church lies in finding paths for healing the wounds inflicted when the gospel appeared in the guise of western culture and accompanying the western colonial endeavour. Pre-Christian cultural and religious heritage gains some validation within this schema because they too reflect, even if "in part," the universal truth of a creator God. Natural theology, in other words, appears to validate the pre-Christian experience and so perhaps provides a means to reappropriate the local cultural heritage. However, seeking a solution in natural theology is more ambiguous than may first appear. The key problem examined in this essay is the definition of "universality," which lies at the heart of claims regarding natural theology. It argues that reference to universality is a continuation of a western view of the world and so remains within a colonial pattern of intercultural engagement. Natural theology does not help address the experience of cultural alienation—it reinforces it.

To make this point, the following begins by defining natural theology and how this apologetic project leads to the idea of a "point of contact" between the gospel and local cultures. It then turns to the described experience of cultural alienation and to some arguments located within natural theology that seek to confirm the value of the pre-Christian religious and cultural heritage. Such arguments, however, are not straightforward and certainly not universal across cultures. The problem is further developed by reference to the experience and expectations of German missions and to how their

theologies, see Russell Re Manning (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Natural Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[2] Gordon R. Lewis, "General Revelation Makes Cross-Cultural Communication Possible," *ERT* 41(2017): 292–307, at 294.

[3] Lewis, "General Revelation Makes Cross-Cultural Communication Possible," 300.

mission method was grounded within a particular German view of the world. The essay ends by affirming the need to recover, for the sake of the faith, pre-Christian culture, but rejects the project of natural theology as a way forward.

NATURAL THEOLOGY: NON-RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE, UNIVERSAL AND RATIONAL

As one definition, John Macquarrie describes natural theology as "the knowledge of God … accessible to all rational human beings without recourse to any special or supposedly supernatural revelation."[4] Of note, first, is the deliberate contrast that forms between a "general" and a "special" revelation. Natural theology, it is argued, should bring us to a knowledge of God with reference only to what may be evident generally in nature, and apart from any notion of God's own acting in making God's own self known. Second, this knowledge develops through a process of human reasoning and takes account of mundane, everyday human experience. The rational human being can construct arguments for the divine by reassembling the clues left by the divine in the ordering of creation. However, while human experience is a key source of data, it is not experience as described by religious language and ritual. Reference to religious formulations and the accompanying practices would move the discussion into particular religious traditions. Rather, third, the value of this human experience lies in its generality. Natural theology identifies and constructs its arguments upon the possibility of a universal that is not itself dependent upon one's social, cultural, linguistic, or religious location. It is conceived to be transcultural and transhistorical reality. From these three elements—a natural knowledge (in deliberate distinction to any special revelation), reason, and the universal—natural theology constructs arguments for the nature of God and where God may be found.

One reason for this proposed distance from religious discourse and its identification with rational argument lies in the apologetic end towards which much Christian natural theology is directed. For William Alston, natural theology is "the enterprise of providing support for religious beliefs by starting from premises that neither are nor presuppose any religious

[4] John Macquarrie, "Natural Theology," in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Theology* (ed. Alister E. McGrath; Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993), 402–405, at 402.

beliefs."[5] Natural theology seeks to undo barriers to belief. One such barrier developed in the post-Enlightenment era with the rise of the scientific method. It became necessary to prove the existence of God using methods reasonable to science so as to seem intelligible for those now suspicious of the authority given to the institutions of revealed theology. If it were possible to demonstrate the possibility of the divine within an account of the world acceptable to the scientific imagination, then special revelation would grant greater detail as to the nature of this God. Or, to continue with Macquarrie, "[i]n a secularized society, [natural theology] provides a bridge from everyday concerns to God-language and the experiences which such language reflects."[6] Natural theology serves this apologetic function, making the faith "intelligible" in terms that are not those of the faith itself. It proposes a ground external to the gospel upon which all people might stand. And, if all people may agree on this point, then the special revelation of God in Christ is a logical progression. This external ground establishes a "point of contact" between the faith and the wider cultural discourse.

While natural theology can appear as a very formal philosophical discussion, or in detailed conversation with the hard sciences, it equally speaks to a more mundane approach that appeals to a revelation of God in creation. This expands to include the missionary intent of a Christian natural theology. David Fergusson puts it this way, "the natural capacity of the human mind to raise theological questions can provide a *praeparatio evangelii*, a context within which the distinctive claims of the Christian faith can be presented and more easily heard."[7] This idea of a "preparation for the gospel" or of a "point of contact" that establishes a local entry point for the proclamation of the distinctive Christian gospel is a central end to which much Christian natural theology is turned. Indeed, as an oft-stated assumption of natural theology, special revelation, the explicit knowledge of God in Jesus Christ, would be impossible without a prior ground in general revelation. For example, James Barr maintains that the "pre-existing natural knowledge of God … makes it possible for humanity to receive the

[5] William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 190.
[6] Macquarrie, "Natural Theology," 405.
[7] David Fergusson, "Types of Natural Theology," in *The Evolution of Rationality: Interdisciplinary Essays in Honor of J. Wentzel van Huyssteen* (ed. F. LeRon Shults; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 380–93, at 387.

additional 'special' revelation … The 'natural' knowledge of God, however dim, is an awareness of the true God, and provides a point of contact without which the special revelation would never be able to penetrate to people."[8] To deny a natural theology is to deny the very possibility of human beings ever knowing God. According to this position, the intelligibility of the faith necessitates a knowledge of God located in nature. It can also appear to be a way forward for those who in becoming Christian experience an alienation from their own land and place.

CHRISTIANISATION AND THE ONGOING TRAUMA OF ALIENATION FROM LOCAL CULTURES

Natural theology as establishing a "point of contact" or a "redemptive analogy" between the gospel and local culture directs our attention to the question of "contextualisation."[9] Contextualisation is a complex concept but is defined here simply as the possibility for the gospel to be spoken in local language and given social form in local institution and ritual. In a contested post-colonial context, the intelligibility of the faith means developing local theologies. There is a clear recognition, to quote Mogola Kamiali, that western missionaries "imported Christianity wrapped in their ideologies, cultural technologies, scientific cosmologies, and personal idiosyncrasies."[10] This resulted in the faith being identified as "foreign" or "white man's religion."[11] It could not be otherwise because there is no such thing as a gospel without context, without embodiment, a point to which we shall return. But this very locatedness of the western missionary message included

[8] James Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology*, *The Gifford Lectures for 1991: Delivered in the University of Edinburgh* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 1.

[9] For the language of "redemptive analogy," see Don Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1984); and Don Richardson, *Peace Child* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1981). For a critical reading of this approach, one that denies the possibility of a "redemptive" analogy in general revelation and apart from special revelation, see Bruce A. Demarest and Richard J. Harpel, "Don Richardson's 'Redemptive Analogies' and the Biblical Idea of Revelation," *Bibliotheca sacra* 146 (1989): 330–40. Such terminology seems to be of limited usage within the literature. More common is that of "point of contact."

[10] Mogola Kamiali, "Missionary Attitudes: A Subjective and Objective Analysis," *MJT* 2 (1986): 145–73, at 145.

[11] Joe Gaqurae, "Indigenization as Incarnation: The Concept of a Melanesian Christ," in *Living Theology in Melanesia* (ed. J. D. May; Point Series 8; Goroka: Melanesian Institute, 1985), 207–17, at 208.

significant and often fateful consequences for the local embodiment of the gospel.

First, it meant the importation of questions and theological schemes which for Robert Hagesi, "are not relevant and intelligible to, or not even functional in, the various situations, cultures, and issues" within this local context.[12] Inasmuch as a materialist cosmology framed the interpretation of the gospel as presented by the western missionaries, the message often failed to address basic human needs in cultural worlds filled with spirits. William Longgar, for example, laments the way in which "borrowed theologies" ignore "the existential realities that Melanesians face every day: sickness and healing, spirit possession, high infant mortality rates, crop failures, barrenness among women, unemployment, job promotion, and other real life issues."[13] A Christianity that ignores, or that even denigrates local questions as superstition, produces something Longgar names "dysfunctional" Christianity. Downey, referring to the same problem, talks of a "spiritual vacuum" or a "superficial adherence to Christianity, which fails to penetrate to the deeper levels, a compartmentalisation, or, indeed, a conflict situation within the newly-converted Christian."[14] This speaks not simply to a failure in reconciling two views of the world, but to a fundamental conflict between the two, leading to a "split in the soul of the Christian, for whom the traditional worldview continues to remain central to his or her experience."[15] Patrick Dodson and Jacinta Elston, two Aboriginal theologians, extend the point, noting how "[i]mportant links with cultural beliefs and practice can be placed under tension as believers can experience church practices that separate them from key family, social and spiritual values. As Aboriginal people enter into the life of a Christian church community, they can find themselves compelled to leave their culture 'at the door'."[16] One finds this

[12] Robert Hagesi, "Towards a Melanesian Christian Theology," *MJT* 1 (1985), 17–24, at 17.
[13] William Kenny Longgar, "Authenticating Melanesian Biblical Theology: A Response to Foreign Theologies," in *Living in the Family of Jesus: Critical Contextualization in Melanesia and Beyond* (ed. William Kenny Longgar and Tim Meadowcroft; Archer Studies in Pacific Christianity; Auckland: Archer Press, 2016), 29–56, at 31. On this point, one often finds reference to the discussion in Paul G. Hiebert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," *Missiology* 10 (1982): 35–47.
[14] James Downey, "Baptism and the Elemental Spirits of the Universe," *MJT* 12 (1996): 7–23, at 8.
[15] Downey, "Baptism and the Elemental Spirits of the Universe," 8.
[16] Patrick L. Dodson, Jacinta K. Elston, and Brian F. McCoy, "Leaving Culture at the Door:

exact point repeated within Africa, Asia, and Latin America to the extent that Tinyiko Maluleke can conclude, "[t]o be truly Christian means not to be truly African."[17] This speaks to a self-alienation and informs how the Christian and the Christian community lives in relation to its social and cultural context.

"Denationalisation" is one way of naming this experience of alienation. This refers to the removal of a convert or a community from the wider social context by radically changing social patterns, institutions, and behaviours. The expectation of sometimes radical social and cultural discontinuity resulted from a noted incompatibility between certain cultural practices (widow burning, head hunting, polygamy, slavery, etc.) and the moral demands of the gospel. However, while such examples of discontinuity may be clear, the process of "Christianisation," as it was called, encompassed a wider range of changes to the social order, its institutions, and the political and economic landscape. Dick Avi, for example, laments the loss of "some very fundamental and noble values, or traditions" when indigenous Christians were "taught to throw away all their traditional, and customary,

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Aboriginal Perspectives on Christian Belief and Practice," *Pacifica* 19 (2006): 249–62, at 250. See also John Kadiba, "In Search of a Melanesian Theology," in *The Gospel is Not Western: Black Theologies from the Southwest Pacific* (ed. Gary W. Trompf; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 139–47, at 141: "Theologies and Christian traditions in Melanesia remain foreign in character and expression. Melanesians who have had a Christian religious experience have been absorbed into church structures and traditions that are foreign to them. They have expressed their new religious experience in and through religious symbols that are exotic to them. So, in religious experience and religious symbolism, Melanesian Christians have been alienated from their traditional ways. Hence, there is a foreignness about their Christianity."

[17] Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, "Christ in Africa: The Influence of Multi-Culturity on the Experience of Christ," *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 8 (1994): 49–64, at 53. For an example from Hong Kong, see Archie C. C. Lee, "Cross-Textual Hermeneutics and Identity in Multi-Scriptural Asia," in *Christian Theology in Asia* (ed. Sebastian C. H. Kim; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 179–204, at 198–99. Desmond Tutu, "Whither African Theology," in *Christianity in Independent Africa* (ed. Edward W. Fasholé-Luke et al.; London: Rex Collings, 1978), 364–69, at 366, can even state: "With part of himself [the African] has been compelled to pay lip service to Christianity as understood, expressed and preached by the white man. But with an ever-greater part of himself, a part he has often been ashamed to acknowledge openly and which he has struggled to repress, he has felt that his Africanness was being violated. The white man's largely cerebral religion was hardly touching the depths of his African soul: he was being redeemed of sins he did not believe he had committed; he was given answers, and often splendid answers, to questions he had not asked."

practices, ceremonies, symbols, songs, and dances, with the attendant spirituality, and religious, or cultural, beliefs."[18] This reflects what was often a complete disregard of local cultural substance on behalf of western missionaries.

Now distanced from traditional ways of displaying citizenship and even prohibited from fulfilling one's duties to the national community, the convert and the Christian community needed to form a new society.[19] This was accomplished in a number of ways. One approach consisted of the Christian community withdrawing from the social and political world, enclosing itself within its newly developed cultural world. In doing this it became "a foreign body in its own people," a church "beside the people."[20] This only entrenched the foreignness of the faith as local communities opted out of public discourse.

A second approach assumed a protectionist stance. This occurred when the foreign missionary stressed the importance of (some) traditional values to the extent that the local communities were placed outside the emerging economies and political narratives that developed in the encounter with western colonial forces.[21] This again succeeded in "alienating" the Christian community from the wider cultural forces; it stymied natural cultural development by linking the embodiment of the faith with a traditional past. The community was always referred to this past.

A third approach *de facto* maintained parallel belief systems. Some may apply the term "syncretism" to this concern.[22] However, insofar as the faith

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[18] Dick Avi, "Contextualisation in Melanesia," *MJT* 4 (1988): 7–22, at 16.

[19] For example, W. V. Lucas, "The Christian Approach to Non-Christian Customs," in *Essays Catholic and Missionary* (ed. Edmund Robert Morgan; London: SPCK, 1928), 114–51, at 118, noted how "[c]ustom will demand his participation with his relatives and kindred in much of which he may feel a real distrust, and yet, if he refuses to be associated with his fellow tribesmen in what are regarded as essential acts of citizenship and duties to the community, he begins to be in danger of cutting himself off completely, and at the end becoming an outcast."

[20] Karl Hartenstein, "Adaptation or Revolution," *The Student World* 28 (1935): 308–27, at 317.

[21] Esau Tuza, "Cultural Suppression? Not Quite!: A Case in Solomon Islands Methodism," *Catalyst* 7 (1977): 106–26.

[22] Longgar, "Authenticating Melanesian Biblical Theology," 49: "Often they are tempted to revert to the primal gods in times of sickness and the new yam harvest. Furthermore, one can see the outworking of traditional religion creeping into the church and resulting in either apostasy or syncretism." Christopher Kouha, "A Comparison Between the God of the Bible

failed to address everyday questions of human existence within a particular local cultural and historical context, it follows that these questions would continue to be addressed by traditional and established remedies. Writing in 1968 and in the context of post-independence Nigeria, Bolaji Idowu notes how the failure to take account of indigenous beliefs and customs, and the presentation of Jesus Christ as a "completely new God who had had nothing to do with the past of Africa," destroyed any potential bridging between the pre-Christian religious and cultural world to the new creation with Jesus Christ at its centre.[23] As the faith entered speaking in "strange tongues" and without any thought of translation, Christians came to:

> live ambivalent spiritual lives. Christianity to them is a fashionable religion which has the habit of beginning and ending within the walls of a church building; it does not reach those vital areas of the personal needs of Africans. Thus, it is possible for an African to sing lustily in Church, 'Other refuge have I none', while still carrying an amulet somewhere on his person, or being able to go out of the Church straight to his diviner, without feeling that he is betraying any principle.[24]

While these three approaches may appear different, they stem from the same root: from a disconnect between expected forms of the Christian faith and the traditional local systems of identity, belonging, and citizenship.

Such attempts to create and maintain Christian cultural worlds did not occur in a vacuum; they drew upon an assumed and basic identification between western culture and the Christian gospel. Whatever the affirmation

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and the Tannese Primal Gods: An Apologetic to Educate Tannese Christians," *MJT* 31 (2015): 220–84, at 220. On the need for a critical syncretism, see John Roxborogh, "Loyalty to Christ: Conversion, Contextualization, and Religious Syncretism," in Longgar and Meadowcroft, *Living in the Family of Jesus*, 345–58.

[23] E. Bolaji Idowu, "The Predicament of the Church in Africa," in *Christianity in Tropical Africa: Studies Presented and Discussed at the Seventh International African Seminar, University of Ghana, April 1965* (ed. Christian G. Baëta; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 417–37, at 433.

[24] Idowu, "The Predicament of the Church in Africa," 433. See also Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 15–30. This chapter refers to Jaime Bulatao's concept of a "split-level Christianity." The problem, however, rests in how Bulatao sets the problem as a contest with a set Christian (Catholic) view against a traditional view. This assumes a fundamental direction from the traditional to the Catholic reinforcing the notion that the two are properly incommensurate, and the task is transitioning from one to the other.

of local values, to become Christian included assuming a particular spiritual posture developed within the West over a sustained period of time. For Aboriginal scholar and Baptist minister, Graham Paulson, the evangelisation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait people consisted of the "telling of the story of the gospel as it was acculturated in the western world, and translated into the subcultures of denominational religious institutions."[25] The language of "subcultures" in reference to denominational differences is not accidental; it refers to a framing aesthetic which names theological claims and their corresponding social embodiment in modes of ministry, rituals, hymnology, and practices. To continue with Paulson, "Aboriginal people have been obliged to adopt western styles of worship and church leadership."[26] This includes an imported reality of schism, one which continually refers questions of diversity in practices and theological questioning back to Europe. To again quote Dick Avi, "[t]he old conflicts of the Reformation in Western Christendom had been resurrected in Melanesian Christianity. In the religious sense, the people are alienated from their society, and are living in Europe or America."[27] In other words, the experience of alienation includes within it a consistent referral back to the West as properly framing discussions concerning the local embodiment of the faith.

Nor it is issue confined to the past. It continues to be an ongoing concern in relation to globalisation. Anthony Giddens defines globalisation as "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa."[28] Such intensification is, of course, often unidirectional: social, political, economic, or even climate related events within much of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania fail to attract much attention. Or, as Longaar suggests, "when the rules of reciprocity are overlooked and a dominant group imposes its values and philosophies on the receiving group, an unhealthy culture of subservience is created."[29] This applies to the faith itself, whereby "dominant Christian groups" continue to impose, albeit in a less direct manner, "their theologies on receiving groups,

[25] Graham Paulson, "Towards an Aboriginal Theology," *Pacifica* 19 (2006): 310–20, at 311.
[26] Paulson, "Towards an Aboriginal Theology," 311.
[27] Avi, "Contextualisation in Melanesia," 16.
[28] Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, CT: Stanford University Press, 1990), 64.
[29] Longgar, "Authenticating Melanesian Biblical Theology," 26.

with a resulting tendency to ethnocentrism, ignorance, and intellectual dishonesty on the part of the dominant Christian groups."[30] Even as the numerical dominance of Christianity is now located in the global South, the West maintains a controlling voice, not the least though its financial resources.

When thinking through the effect of western colonisation on the local appropriation of the gospel, one could emphasise the position articulated by the sober voice of evangelical Latin American missiologist Orlando Costas. In forthright terms, he states that the "missionary enterprise has been used as a justification and a cover for the domination of people. The interrelation between mission, technology, and imperialism is well known. The expansionistic ambitions of militarily and economically powerful countries have always been accompanied by a missionary interest."[31] This approach locates mission within a wider geopolitical account. Religious change succeeds precisely in denationalisation and so facilitates changes in national allegiance.

While there is truth in this account, its focus on the political and economic shifts attention away from colonialism as including a range of cultural accompaniments deemed necessary to becoming "Christian."[32] Idowu states that:

> the Church in Africa came into being with prefabricated theology, liturgies and traditions. In the matter of Christian ethics, the converts found themselves in the position of those early converts before the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15): "Unless you are circumcised after the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved"; and that is virtually the position today.[33]

Note the link between theology, liturgy, tradition, and ethics. Christian identity itself traded on a form of cultural proselytism,[34] one embedded within the mundane elements of church life: practices, rituals, hymnology,

[30] Longgar, "Authenticating Melanesian Biblical Theology," 26.
[31] Orlando E. Costas, *The Church and Its Mission: A Shattering Critique from the Third World* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1974), 245. See further Orlando E. Costas, *Christ Outside the Gate: Mission Beyond Christendom* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982), 58–69.
[32] For more on this, see John G. Flett, *Apostolicity: The Ecumenical Question in World Christian Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 164–75.
[33] Idowu, "The Predicament of the Church in Africa," 426.
[34] See the short commentary in Polonhou S. Pokawin, "Interaction Between Indigenous and Christian Traditions," in *The Gospel is Not Western: Black Theologies from the Southwest Pacific* (ed. Gary W. Trompf; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 23–31.

liturgies, creeds, etc. These contributed to a process of deracination: the uprooting of local peoples from the native environment and culture.[35] Pulling all these threads together, Keiti Ann Kanongata'a names the peoples of the Pacific as having been "raped of their cultural honour."[36] This very strong language speaks to a forcible removal of what makes a person a person. Terry LeBlanc, speaking from a Native American context, notes how, living with a "false belief that a relationship with their Creator required them to reject their own identity and adopt another—a European one," subjected "Indigenous people to deep-rooted self-doubt at best, and self-hatred—a death more heinous than their physical eradication—at worst."[37] Cameroonian Catholic theologian, Engelbert Mveng, names this experience one of "anthropological poverty."

> When persons are deprived not only of goods and possessions of a material, moral, intellectual, cultural, or sociological order, but of everything that makes up the foundation of their being-in-the-world and the specificity of their 'ipseity' [individual identity, selfhood] as individual, society, and history—when persons are bereft of their identity, their dignity, their freedom, their thought, their history, their language, their faith universe, and their basic creativity, deprived of all their rights, their hopes, their ambitions—they sink into a kind of poverty which no longer concerns only exterior or interior goods or possessions but strikes at the very being, essence, and dignity of the human person.[38]

A person and a community become unmoored, without an anchor and identity, and so dependent on another history to provide a story and a meaning.[39] Mveng extends this to include poverty and systemic racism. In

[35] See, for example, the judgment of John Henry Okullu, *Church and Politics in East Africa* (Nairobi: Uzima Publishing House, 1974), 8: "The missionaries who brought Christianity, rid Africa of all its traditional values and religious concepts in order to have a clean plate on which to put the new faith."

[36] Keiti Ann Kanongata'a, "Why Contextual?" *PJT* n.s. 27 (2002): 21–40, at 25.

[37] Terry LeBlanc, "Mission: An Indigenous Perspective," *Direction* 43 (2014): 152–65, at 152.

[38] Engelbert Mveng, "Improverishment and Liberation: A Theological Approach for Africa in the Third World," in *Paths of African Theology* (ed. Rosino Gibellini; London: SCM, 1994), 154–65, at 156.

[39] Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 51, for example, notes how "theological consciousness presupposes religious tradition, and tradition requires memory, and memory is integral to identity: without memory we have no past, and if we have no past, we lose our identity."

other words, this poverty extends to corruption, violence, suicide, and to the disposability of people.

Keiti Ann's statement comes from an article concerned with contextualisation. Contextualisation, in other words, is viewed as a proper avenue for the healing of cultural trauma.[40] It is conceived as a way of re-establishing a traditional foundation and story, one which "will uplift us from our powerlessness to our God-given dignity."[41] Such uplift, by extension, will help heal the trauma of the devaluation of the cultural past and the accompanying anthropological poverty with its ongoing acute socio-political consequences.

The Ambiguities of Using Natural Theology to Identify the God Before the Missionaries

Christian voices throughout Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania lament as one this loss of cultural heritage in the process of becoming and being Christian. The foreignness of the faith to a local context, its unintelligibility, is a problem for which natural theology is seen as some form of solution. However, though the role western colonisation has played in the process is evident, less evident, perhaps, is the potential role played by claims to natural theology.

One way of healing the trauma of cultural discontinuity lies in the recovery of local values and tradition. Contextualisation, so understood, includes reforging some continuity between the contemporary embodiment of the Christian faith and the cultural traditions and histories of the local context. Natural theology, so the argument goes, assists this process by establishing a theological bridge between the pre-Christian understanding of God and the contemporary embodiment of the faith. It begins with a position such as outlined by David Fergusson. After an extended overview of different approaches to natural theology, he concludes: "Some of the Psalms and wisdom literature appeal to patterns of common experience and observation that are universal and provide a trans-cultural awareness of God."[42] This is an appeal to biblical warrant and assumes that the text affirms a knowledge

[40] As Avi, "Contextualisation in Melanesia," 16, suggests, indigenisation was undertaken "in the hope of recovering the broken ties between … their own people and culture." See also Gaqurae, "Indigenization as Incarnation," 208.
[41] Kanongata'a, "Why Contextual?" 25.
[42] Fergusson, "Types of Natural Theology," 392.

of God undetermined by any cultural heritage. It is often linked to God's act of creating, and the ongoing work of the Spirit in creation. However, such an approach does not simply refer to creation, to reflecting upon the stars as God's handiwork. It immediately turns to "culture" as the location of God's acting, to local law and custom, even while the value of this knowledge lies in its being transcultural. Though it is unclear how one can move so quickly from creation to culture, the "dim" knowledge of God found in human cultures constitutes the point of contact between this culture and the word of God. Local law and custom served to prepare the way for the particular word of Jesus Christ.

One sees these types of arguments providing some validation of traditional cultural heritage. William Longgar, for example, draws a direct connection between the Christian God and the spiritual history of Melanesian communities. To quote:

> Melanesians' own unique stories about this immutable, gracious, holy, and merciful God who journeyed with their ancestors between time and space. For years, Melanesians wanted to know this God, thus they gave him local names that could only explain in religious terms who this invisible power was. Until the time that a fuller revelation of Jesus Christ through the Gospel message enabled them to come face to face with the one who was once hidden from them.[43]

Drawing on Galatians 3:23–25, he describes "[t]raditional Melanesian spirituality" as "the 'school master' or 'guardian' or 'custodian' of the Melanesians until they came of age to inherit the truth of the Gospel and share in their inheritance in Christ."[44] This suggests that traditional culture may be understood as having a similar function to the Jewish Law for the early Jewish-Christian community. Not only was the Christian God present within local culture, but the culture itself, with its law and custom, prepared the people for the entrance of the gospel. Because western missionaries

[43] Longgar, "Authenticating Melanesian Biblical Theology," 38. Kamiali, "Missionary Attitudes,"153, observes the claim made within Albert M. Kiki's book, *Kiki: Ten Thousand Years in a Lifetime* (Melbourne: F. W. Cheshire, 1968), that "the ten commandments were already in existence among his people, before missionaries put their foot on our land."

[44] Longgar, "Authenticating Melanesian Biblical Theology", 29. For a development of this idea using Gal 4:1–5, see John M. Hitchen, "Mission to Primal Religious Groups in a Postmodern Context," in *Mission and Postmodernities* (ed. Rolv Olsen; London: Regnum, 2011), 139–71.

approached traditional religious practices with disdain, considering them to be "animistic and 'primitive'," they unable to see how "the almighty and loving God could ever be in Melanesia before the missionaries set foot on the shores of that land."[45] Any beginning point that demonises the local culture, fails to appreciate where points of contact might be found within the local culture. By comparison, Longgar holds that "every primal society and its culture bears the fingerprint of God and awaits the fuller revelation of the Gospel."[46] The benefit of this position lies precisely in the theological account of continuity with the cultural past it creates.

However, not everyone accepts this strong affirmation of God's presence within pre-Christian culture. Ma'afu Palu, for example, takes up this claim that the Christian God was "already worshipped by our pre-Christian ancestors here in the Pacific," that these gods, whether they be "a shark, a tree, and so forth, were cultural expressions of the God the missionaries brought to the Pacific."[47] For him, whatever the religious practice and belief of the ancestors, "they were not, in any reasonable sense, worshipping the God of the Bible, the God, who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."[48] He grounds his conclusion in what he describes as both "historical evidence" and "biblical statement."[49] Specifically, he grounds this conclusion in a typical account of natural theology. Referring to the nature Psalms (e.g., Ps 19:1; and 33:6) and Romans 1, he notes that the general revelation of God in creation leads not to a saving knowledge due to our fallen natures. The opposite is true: the knowledge of God in creation condemns us. Instead of worshipping the living God, humanity turned to the idolatry of worshipping created things.[50] In terms of the religious pre-history, Palu finds little by way of continuity with the Christian gospel—and he does this using rather traditional arguments for natural theology. Local culture is disciplined by the law to bring us both to a knowledge of our own guilt; the law serves to 'civilise' local cultures and opens space for to be able to hear the gospel.

[45] Avi, "Contextualisation in Melanesia," 15.
[46] Longgar, "Authenticating Melanesian Biblical Theology," 27.
[47] Ma'afu Palu, "Distinguishing the Religion of Our Pre-Christian Ancestors from the Religion of the Missionaries," *MJT* 26 (2010): 91–99, at 91.
[48] Palu, "Distinguishing the Religion of Our Pre-Christian Ancestors," 92.
[49] Palu, "Distinguishing the Religion of Our Pre-Christian Ancestors," 93.
[50] Palu, "Distinguishing the Religion of Our Pre-Christian Ancestors," 94–95.

A second argument for identifying the presence of God before the arrival of the missionaries is through the idea of a "high-God."[51] Ferdinand Nwaigbo argues that, while African languages ascribed many names to God, there was "only one Supreme God in the belief of the people … The fact that the missionaries who came to Africa brought a new God is not a tenable idea. In fact, God has been alive and active in Africa even before the arrival of the white missionaries."[52] The claim, again located within an account of creation, is that no matter the variety of ways for naming God they all name the same God—the creator God who is the God of Jesus Christ. This is, of course, a key missionary strategy, especially in the context of translating the Bible into vernacular languages. The translator finds the local word for this high-god and uses this for the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Precisely in this translation process, however, it becomes clear that not every culture or religion has a high-god. While what was known as "primal" societies might well claim a form of high-god, non-personalist accounts of the divine common in Asia, such as Buddhism, for example, include no reference to any god, high or otherwise.[53] In other words, reference to a high-god is not a universal, true across all cultures for all times. If we acknowledge this and still want to maintain that our local culture did have a high-god, then we must also argue for a certain selectivity in this natural revelation of God. Nor, even if a high-god may be named, is it self-evident that this god is good. In relation to the Melanesian context, Marilyn Rowsome, notes that, "[i]f there is a concept of a high god, or creative spirits, they are the object of legend and myth, not worship, for they are inactive, and unapproachable."[54] Rufus Pech makes the same observation in relation to finding a name for God for a local language translation of the Bible in Melanesia.[55] The process is ambiguous and no single option presents itself. On the one hand, we may

[51] On the idea of a "high-God," see Wilhelm Schmidt, "The Nature, Attributes and Worship of the Primitive High God," in *Reader in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach* (ed. William Armand Lessa and Evon Zartman Vogt; London: Harper and Row, 1965), 21–33.

[52] Ferdinand Nwaigbo, "Cosmic Christology and Eco-Theology in Africa," *AFER* 53 (2011): 437–61, at 444–45. For a Melanesian example, see Roy B. Yosef, "Pre-Gospel Belief in Vanuatu," *MJT* 14 (1998): 69–76, at 70–71.

[53] One could also refer here to the First Nations peoples of Australia. See Gideon C. Goosen, "Christian and Aboriginal Interface in Australia," *TS* 60 (1999): 72–94, at 82–86.

[54] Marilyn Rowsome, "Melanesian Traditional Religion," *MJT* 17 (2001): 36–56, at 41.

[55] Rufus Pech, "The Name of God in Melanesia," *MJT* 1 (1985): 29–45.

read the desire to find a high-god in our religious histories as the result of a Christian projection upon those histories, conforming those histories to supposed transcultural natural knowledge of God. On the other hand, the identification of a high-god established a norm that helped suppress an additional plurality of spiritual beings, and attendant forms of spirituality and ritual, found within local cosmology.[56]

The identification of a high-god, in other words, prompted a related dismissal of the wider culture, its cosmologies and associated spiritualities. As Helen De Cruz and Johan De Smedt point out, arguments for natural theology do not seek "tree spirits, trolls, or mermaids."[57] Rather, "[d]ue to their Christian or post-Christian background," they seek a "generic theism, Christian theism, and scientific naturalism as the default options, and concentrate on these in their argumentation, leaving aside a rich diversity of views from, for example, Mormonism, Jainism, and Wicca."[58] Natural theology, due to its historic Christian roots, does not attend to other religions as they are, but looks for a determined form, which corresponds to a theist or deist view of the world. The complex cosmologies of primal or indigenous accounts of the divine are simply not entertained by traditional natural theology. Local experience, as codified also in spiritualities, religious practices and institutions, customs, and laws, are reinterpreted and evaluated according to this idea of a single high-god. It is a universality that imposes a certain pattern upon religious history and ignores what does not fit within that pattern as not belonging to a universal knowledge of the divine. Even though it assumes the character of the local, it smooths out or even nullifies local particularities. This includes, by extension, a lack of detailed reflection on the various social institutions, language, rituals, spiritualities, and practices, grounded in and formed in relation to those beliefs.

[56] See Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 97–101. Here Bediako notes the difficulty Christian scholars, of both western and African origin, have had with the plurality of spiritual beings in the primal imagination, and how reference to the one transcendent God serves to suppress rather than address that plurality.

[57] Helen De Cruz and Johan De Smedt, "Naturalizing Natural Theology," *Religion, Brain & Behavior* 6 (2016): 355–61, at 357.

[58] De Cruz and De Smedt, "Naturalizing Natural Theology," 357.

These brief examples serve only to highlight that reference using natural theology to establish some connection between the local form of the Christian faith and the pre-Christian religious and cultural heritage is an interpretive and value-laden endeavour: it is possible to use the same arguments, built on the same biblical texts, to both validate and condemn local cultures. Often, such as the claims made regarding a high-god, the argument appears predetermined and local experiences forced into a pattern not their own. Indeed, to develop the point further, this predetermination is linked to an account of a universal and normative experience, and that is an experienced defined by a view of the world derived from the western tradition. To illustrate this contention, the following two sections examine the missionary theology of German missions during the early and mid-twentieth century.

The connecting point between natural theology and this missionary endeavour lies in the infamous debate between Karl Barth and Emil Brunner regarding natural theology. While many have examined and commented upon this discussion, none has pointed to where Brunner himself locates his argument: in German mission theory. That is, Brunner understands his argument for natural theology to come from a missionary concern for western societies that were experiencing the end of Christendom and the rise of paganism and secularism.[59] As it was a missionary concern, Brunner drew on two mission theorists: Bruno Gutmann and Siegfried Knak.[60]

Bruno Gutmann (1876–1966) was a missionary and mission theorist who lived and worked for thirty-six years (1902–1938) among the Chagga people in the Kilimanjaro area of central Africa. His basic position was informed by the *Volkschristianiserung* (conversion of whole people groups) approach to missions. This approach, developed by the likes of Gustav Warneck (1834–1910), was concerned primarily with the question of indigenisation. To cite Warneck, mission should seek to implant "Christianity into the foreign soil of heathen nations in such a way that it takes root like a native plant and

[59] For further on this, see John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity,* Missio Dei*, Karl Barth and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 166–72.
[60] Emil Brunner, "Die Bedeutung der Missionarischen Erfahrung für die Theologie," in *Die deutsche evangelische Heidenmission: Jahrbuch 1933 der vereinigten deutschen Missionskonferenzen* (Hamburg: Selbstverlag der Missionskonferenzen, 1933), 3–11, at 10.

grows to be a native tree."[61] This meant, first, rejecting an approach based in individual conversion because this removes people from their local culture and social institutions; second, rejecting a simple transplantation of the institutional church and the baptising of groups of people into this church; and third, rejecting mission strategies that confused christianisation and western civilisation. Instead, to christianise a people was to naturalise the faith, and this required the christianisation of the local language, customs, and social ties.

Schooled in this tradition, Gutmann sought an indigenous Christianity rooted in the *Volkstum*, or the essential character of the people. Gutmann accomplished this through natural theology, and by naming where God had left a permanent witness to Godself in creation. Such a witness he found in "primordial ties." Gutmann regarded primordial ties as valid across time and determinative for every human relationship and community; they were part of the "the fabric of being" and revealed the "order of creation." Gutmann stressed three ties in particular: clan, and so based in blood relationships; neighbourhood, and so based in the same soil; the third one was age groups, and so based in the bonds of hierarchy and social organisation. These three ties, according to Gutmann, were part of the *imago Dei*, and necessary to our maturation into full human beings.

Through these primordial ties God revealed Godself and dwelt with humanity. Gutmann regards both the church and the primordial ties as "divine creations." They are necessarily set in relation to one another because only together do they represent "the fullness of God's immanence in the world of human beings."[62] The primordial ties give revelation form, and it is only through this form or embodiment that revelation can be known. For this reason, Gutmann opposes western civilisation. The West had succumbed to an atomistic view of life, one in which every person was an independent individual, and money had come to replace brother, sister, and neighbour. In dissolving the primordial ties through which God worked, the West was no longer able properly to understand the kingdom of God. A key missionary task, therefore, lay in preserving these ties because they were fundamental to any human relationship with God.

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[61] Gustav Warneck, "Thoughts on the Missionary Century," *Missionary Review of the World* 23 (1900): 413–17, at 416.

[62] Bruno Gutmann, *Gemeindeaufbau aus dem Evangelium: Grundsätzliches für Mission und Heimatkirche* (Leipzig: Evangelische Lutherisch Mission, 1925), 15.

This meant studying the language, customs, and culture of a people. Custom is here defined as how people live together, the shape of their political structures and laws, and their expressions in art and science. The body of Christ, which comes into being through this process, is called a "Volkskirche," a people's church. This was not an imported foreign structure with a foreign history and foreign political divisions but an independent and self-governing community, fully indigenous because informed by the nature of its primordial ties to creation.

This approach to mission, which informed German mission theory through the first half of the twentieth century, is rightly commended for a couple of reasons. First, it was overt in warning against the dangers of confusing the gospel with western culture, the effects of which remain all too evident today. This was a deliberate attempt to name and avoid the pitfalls of replicating western divisions and of uprooting individuals and communities from their social milieu. Second, it was intentional in seeking a local embodiment of the faith. These missionaries did not intend to transplant a German church into foreign soil, but to grow a local church, one with significant continuity with the cultural past. Local custom and law, however fallen it may be, was nonetheless a necessary part of the orders of creation and essential to life in Christ. To quote Stephen Neill, "[o]n many essential matters Gutmann was right; missionaries and colonial authorities alike have often paid too little attention to the background of native thought, to those presuppositions which do not readily find expression in speech, but nevertheless colour and determine the whole of life."[63] They valued local cultures as properly part of the embodiment of the life of Christ and, especially when considered in relation to other missionary approaches, this approach proved less destructive for local life and culture. They accomplished this via a robust and sustained theological account of natural theology.

The Directed Substance of a Natural Theology

So far, so good. German missions remained intentional in preserving local cultures because God worked through these primordial ties. It did this based on a number of associated assumptions, the first of which was that each culture reflected the essential national character of a people. However, while

[63] Stephen Neill, *Colonialism and Christian Missions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 401.

each people had an essential character, by no means were those characters equal. There was clear hierarchy, with western Christian culture and, in particular, German culture standing at the top. This is illustrated by reference to Siegfried Knak (1875–1955), the second missiologist identified by Brunner. Knak is interesting because he sets out a clear pathway from this idea of local contextualisation and God working though universal orders in creation to the affirmation of Hitler as an evangelist. If God works through culture, and if every culture has a unique character, it follows that the re-establishing of German pride and culture and so the primordial ties of "blood and soil" would lead to a re-encounter between God and the German people.

His logic is as follows: mission and especially German mission, has long recognised the "significance of national values and traditions for humanity and history."[64] Mission does not destroy these values. Quite the opposite, those who hold the greatest guilt for such local destruction Knak names as western civilisation, global trade, global politics, and the industrialisation of Africa and Asia. These forces stand guilty of "atomizing the nations in order to create willing 'worker peoples' for harvesting the raw materials of the other continents; and the cultural imperialism seeking to subject all of humanity to the influence of the western lifestyle and the western world of ideas."[65] The German approach, in other words, developed also as an overt rejection of what they saw as Anglo-American imperialism. The better approach in the German mind began with a recognition that God has blessed each people with a "*unique national character*." The missionary task consisted also of countering "these destructive and disintegrative forces by helping distant people groups to recognise and take ownership of their own unique national or racial attributes."[66] Should these peoples abandon their local character in favour of **"**becoming spiritual devotees of western culture," then they become "unable to fully to receive and to grasp the Gospel."[67] Mission seeks to develop each local national character because that character is necessary for maturation in the gospel. Each church needs to be embodied in local form.

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[64] Siegfried Knak, "Mission und Kirche im Dritten Reich," in *Das Buch der deutschen Weltmission* (ed. Julius Richter; Gotha: Leopold Klotz Verlag, 1935), 240–44, at 243.
[65] Knak, "Mission und Kirche im Dritten Reich," 243.
[66] Knak, "Mission und Kirche im Dritten Reich," 243.
[67] Knak, "Mission und Kirche im Dritten Reich," 243.

Though Knak developed this logic in missionary terms, it is a logic which comes out of German self-understanding of its own national character, which was exacerbated by the humility of the 1919 Treaty of Versailles. All peoples have their own God-given character, and this character is necessary to the growth of this people in its faith. Hitler and the Third Reich sought to safeguard and develop this German national identity. Because God works through this national character, and because Hitler is trying to restore this character to its proper authority, the experience of Christian missions can "reassure the church so that she can approve of the intentions of the Third Reich *joyfully* and with a clear conscience. For the Third Reich intends to embody the values and traditions of the German nation."[68] The church should happily say yes to the totalitarian claims of the Nazi state because by encouraging the local character it is drawing the church into closer ties with God.[69]

There is much to agree with in the German position. Yes, the embodiment of the faith requires an embodiment in local form. We are not to destroy local cultures, creating a poverty that causes the local to become subjugated to other self-interested global players. We are to affirm local customs and law and to discern where these too lead the church into truth about Jesus Christ. But we also need to consider how this developed account of contextualisation came to support an evil ideology and state apparatus.

First, basic to natural theology is the idea of a general revelation, universal and so transcultural and transhistorical, and accessible to every human being.[70] The key universal driving the German account is the idea of

[68] Knak, "Mission und Kirche im Dritten Reich," 240–44.

[69] Siegfried Knak, "Totalitätsanspruch des Staates und der Totalitätsanspruch Gottes an die Völker," *NAMZ* 10, no. 12 (1933): 401–21, at 406.

[70] James Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology,* addresses Karl Barth's rejection of natural theology, denying "any essential or necessary link between German National Socialism and natural theology" because he finds no sense of universality or of rationality in the National Socialist position. However, Barr, as is all too common with departicularised theological discourses, ignores the named connections between the missionary concerns of contextual theology and the claims of natural theology. It was exactly the idea of the *Volk* as that which constituted the universal, the mundane experience of every human being, and as the substance of human experience that could be rationally deliberated. Furthermore, Barr's own work simply privileges his own theological account above that of the Germans and in that privileging claims some form of universal and non-theological norm. And that is precisely the point: all such claims to normativity disguise the cultural location of the claim itself, but when viewed from different locales the claim's original location becomes evident.

the *Volk*. *Volk* is a word with no adequate equivalent in English. *Volk* speaks to a particular German experience. It is an old word, but takes on great cultural significance in Germany during the Romantic period (from the end of the eighteenth and through the nineteenth centuries). As a reaction to the materialism of Enlightenment Rationalism, German Romanticism included a deeper sense of spirit and mystery. This shift is evident within the idea of *Volk*. As developed by Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), *Volk* referred to an ideal group: to those who were uneducated and rural; those without high culture. This group captured the original spirit of the whole people group. This was "a living organism comprising all individualities within a nation. It was the result of a historical process (*Werden*), uniting the present generation with those long since dead and those still to be born in a metaphysical unity."[71] Every *Volk* had its own separate and unique identity and these were maintained through language and locality. Collective identity was more important than individual identity, and the local language was the only way that one may pray to God.[72] The *Volk*, in other words, was a certain understanding of culture: one tied, first, to a language group, and second to the location of these people, to the land. The identity of this people was pristine and complete at its inception, and the further this people drifted from their land and language, the more they lost their national character.[73] Reference to the essential character of this people is always backwards to this imagined and ideal past and to the uneducated and rural, to those without external contacts which might dilute that essential character.

In response, first, to treat this account of the *Volk* and of the primordial ties as a universal disguises its roots within German culture and national identity. It followed the patterns of a German understanding of social

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[71] Klaus Fiedler, *Christianity and African Culture: Conservative German Protestant Missionaries in Tanzania, 1900–1940* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 14.

[72] Fiedler, *Christianity and African Culture*, 14.

[73] For a further example of the cultural location of this approach, see Bruce L. McCormack, "Why Should Theology be Christocentric?: Christology and Metaphysics in Paul Tillich and Karl Barth," *WTJ* 45 (2010): 42–80, at 51. McCormack notes how the German idealists, in seeking "a real knowledge of the real world," posited "the existence of an original point of identity. To know this original point of identity is to know the unity which continues to underlie subject and object, even in their separation in human consciousness … The purpose of his early *Identitätsphilosophie* was to overcome the gap between the unconscious productivity of nature and the conscious activity of thought by locating the origins of both in one and the same source."

organisation, order, and propriety, and included a strong sense of western superiority. To quote Hans-Werner Gensichen, though Gutmann sought to indigenise the gospel, his "own particular system of indigenisation" reflected a cultural conservatism that amounted to "German nationalism in disguise" and confirmed German superiority.[74] This understanding of culture, in other words, was far from a universal: it developed out of the German experience of its own nationhood as interpreted through the lenses of romanticism and idealism.

Second, with these cultural roots came a particular value system for evaluating what properly belonged to the primordial ties and how these ties might be organised and refined. Basic to this was village life and established tribal systems. With the original *Volk* in the historical past, the repristination of the primordial ties meant a concern with origins and with directing local peoples to this past. It meant valuing practices as they were prior to any encounter with modern life or western civilisation.

On the other hand, it meant that the missionary already had a pattern in mind. The move to indigeneity was not modelled on local life but on an established pattern drawn from the prior German experience. This resulted in a seemingly arbitrary norm regarding which cultural practices were to be retained and which were to be excised. Hilko Schomerus, for example, observes how some missionaries cherished the social patterns of tribal peoples while criticising the Chinese approach to extended family or the Indian caste system.[75] These decisions appeared to be arbitrary, but were grounded in the cultural value system assumed within the idea of a *Volk*.

One theological mechanism for this process of cultural evaluation resided in the distinction between law and gospel—one derived from the Lutheran tradition. The natural becomes identified with the law and the law is understood as disciplining a people in preparation to hear and respond to the gospel. It is at this point that the assumed western superiority enters. In reference to the Bantu, Walter Marx says that "they stand at the beginning of a development beyond which we in Europe have already moved." The Bantu, he continues, "first require an education by the law before they can grasp the

[74] Hans-Werner Gensichen, "German Protestant Missions," in *Missionary Ideologies in the Imperialist Era, 1880–1920* (ed. Torben Christensen and William R. Hutchison; Århus, Denmark: Aros, 1982), 181–90, at 188.

[75] Hilko Wiardo Schomerus, "Die Mission und das Volkstum," in *Missionswissenschaft* (Leipzig: Verlag Quelle und Meyer, 1935), 136–49.

gospel," and we experience "daily with pain that our black Christians want to have the 'law'—and, indeed, need it."[76] To be disciplined by the law means to be civilised to a degree which then allows one to hear and respond to the gospel.[77] There are many examples of this basic racism even in an attempt to respect local culture.

Third, this natural theology set a range of conditions upon revealed theology. To regard primordial ties as necessary to fulness of life as the people of God in each place was to establish a necessary theological framework. Jesus Christ was not an eschatological figure that drew converts towards the kingdom of God. Rather, reference to the kingdom of God meant restoring the orders of creation. Per Hassing notes of Gutmann's position that "the Gospel does not move forward to its consummation in the kingdom of God, but moves back into primeval ties which seem to be static, unchangeable."[78] The idea of a natural theology, its form and function, gave shape to and determined revealed theology.

Natural Theology and Intercultural Violence

This example from German missiology, one which develops links between a natural theology and indigenous expressions of the gospel, illustrates how the assumption of a universal disguises all too particular and value-laden accounts of culture and the proper social form of the gospel. Throughout its history, the "universals" of natural theology have changed, as is evidenced by the terminology used within the German example but foreign to theological discourse today: orders of creation, primal ties, blood and soil. The claim natural theology makes to universality disguises the cultural locations and value systems of those making such claims.[79] Even while affirming it as a project, David Fergusson acknowledges the "context-

[76] Walter Marx, "Mission und dialektische Theologie: Mission und Volkstum," *NAMZ* 10, no. 7 (1933): 225–35, at 227–28.

[77] Willie James Jennings, "Can White People be Saved? Reflections on the Relationship of Missions and Whiteness," in *Can 'White' People be Saved?: Triangulating Race, Theology, and Mission* (ed. Love L. Sechrest, Johnny Ramírez-Johnson, and Amos Yong; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 27–43.

[78] P. Hassing, "Bruno Gutmann of Kilimanjaro: Setting the Record Straight," *Missiology* 7 (1979): 423–33, at 432.

[79] Philip Gibbs, "Grass Roots in Paradise: Contextual Theology for Papua New Guinea," *MJT* 21 (2005): 37–62, at 39.

dependent setting of all natural theology."[80] Natural theology "has a socio-religious context that varies strikingly across cultures."[81] Wesley Wildman too concludes that natural theology avoids evaluation of its own "large-scale world-view," and "aims at direct inference from nature to ultimacy only by mistake—a mistake of oversimplification that takes the form of unanalysed and hidden presuppositions."[82] The traditional project of natural theology disregards its own cultural location, and so disregards the cultural frameworks, apologetic intent, and value systems that define what is "natural."

No such thing as nature exists beyond our interpretation and reading of it. The claim to speak of "nature" is itself contingent upon culture; culture gives us the language, the aesthetic, the interpretive frameworks to discover nature and to draw conclusions about its reality. Nature does not exist as a thing in itself; there is no unmediated access to nature. As Stephen Bevans suggests, "reality is mediated by meaning."[83] Layers of meaning help us make sense of and order our environments. This includes meaning attached to place, to history, to our ancestors, to land (and the possibility or not of owning land), and so includes entire economic systems, along with built space and so the ordering of space and indeed the ordering of time. Yet, because the authority of natural theology resides within this notion of an objective and supra-cultural reality, even while itself developing in service to a local and particular set of cultural questions, natural theology is cultural imperialism in another guise.

Because of this, though natural theology promises some form of continuity with the cultural and religious past, it denies the truth of that past—especially if a local culture fails to name a theistic and personal God.[84]

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[80] Fergusson, "Types of Natural Theology," 382.

[81] Fergusson, "Types of Natural Theology," 384.

[82] Wesley J. Wildman, "Comparative Natural Theology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Natural Theology* (ed. Russell Re Manning; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 370–84, at 373and 381.

[83] Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 4.

[84] As one example, see the 2010 Revised Preamble to the Constitution of the Uniting Church in Australia. https://assembly.uca.org.au/resources/covenanting/item/668-the-revised-preamble. This preamble was developed as part of the covenanting relationship with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC), and reflects a commitment on behalf of the UCA to work for reconciliation with the First Peoples of Australia. §3 makes the following claim: "The First Peoples had already encountered the Creator God before the

Despite its apparent interest in local cultural forms, natural theology exacerbates the problem of vacating our cultural histories. By disregarding its own cultural location, natural theology projects a local value system upon the world, and expects all peoples to confirm to that system. Because natural theology speaks to a universal knowledge, someone from outside the context can already 'know' where and how this God is to be found prior to any engagement with that context. Each particular context itself, in other words, has no particular meaning and adds nothing to the knowledge of God. Someone foreign to the context may well discover metaphors or analogies within a culture, but only with the intent of changing their meaning.

This cultural devaluation is consequent also on a particular kind of theological over-evaluation and associated ratification of the culture that names these universals. As Dalit theologian V. Devasahayam observes "in the name of universal experience, theologians were elevating particular historical experiences into the category of sacred and eternal experience."[85] Contingent cultural claims become merged with key theological positions. All too often Christian natural theology is an exercise in apologetics. In attempting to make the gospel intelligible, apologetic approaches begin with some a point of mediation beyond the gospel itself and in some "universal" position which might be agreed to by all parties.[86] The problem is, to cite Bruce McCormack, "the move from the general to the particular unavoidably

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arrival of the colonisers; the Spirit was already in the land revealing God to the people through law, custom and ceremony. The same love and grace that was finally and fully revealed in Jesus Christ sustained the First Peoples and gave them particular insights into God's ways." This classic formulation of "God before the missionaries" Jione Havea, in a session with UCA candidates exploring the issue of racism during the Wednesday Formation Program, 15 May 2019, described as an instanced of "masked racism." It is so because it is foremost a claim of Christian theology, one made by the settler community and based on a particular commitment irrespective of any local knowledge. It is not a claim non-Christian First Peoples would make concerning their own law, custom, and spirituality. It is a claim that local Christian communities may make, but they would need to do this as a public proclamation and in discussion with alternative claims.

[85] V. Devasahayam, "Doing Dalit Theology: Basic Assumptions," in *Frontiers of Dalit Theology* (ed. V. Devasahayam; Madras: ISPCK, 1997), 270–82, at 272.

[86] "Christian theology began as an apologetic endeavor. It is inevitable in such efforts that common ground will be sought between the Christian apologete and his/her unbelieving audience. Metaphysics has been resorted to in the ancient and modern worlds because it moves from generally-valid first principles (which should be shared by all) to the particularities of Christian belief. McCormack, "Why Should Theology be Christocentric?" 64.

determines the *content* of the Christology which is then elaborated."[87] Whatever "special" revelation may bring to the context, it must conform to the account of the divine already represented in natural theology. Natural theology, because it lies outside explicit theological controls, produces normative accounts of the divine located within cultural affirmations. This then determines all subsequent theological claims—it establishes the "content" of Christology. With this theological edifice in place, particular experiences of the gospel cease to be local and become normative and universal and beyond other theological controls that may address the temptation to cultural accommodations.

The German experience illustrates well this interplay of an understanding of culture, how this culture expects a certain form for the embodiment of the faith, and the variety of theological assertions which follow. Culture was essentialised and this lent itself to an abstracted and static notion of true cultural form, which was fundamentally conservative and retrospective in horizon. This established borders to identity and developed into a value system and aesthetic used to evaluate people as belonging or not-belonging. From this followed a relative valuing of cultures, with some closer to the "gospel" and some further away. To describe the pre-Christian knowledge of God as "dim" and the encounter with Jesus as "fulfilment" suggests an evolutionary account of culture, one directed to an idea of civilisation. While it might allow for differences in surface culture, matters of style, or aesthetic, natural theology works against the possibility that local wisdom will inform our understanding of the gospel itself, that it will critically inform the wider Christian tradition.[88] Ambiguous merit attaches to the pre-Christian history because this is finally something we need to move beyond. If we understand God to be working through culture in an evolutionary or fulfilment mode, it ensures an ongoing hierarchy that privileges cultures that have "had" the gospel for "longer". With natural theology, the imperative always remains with the West, even as the intent is to affirm local cultural heritage.

Due to this hierarchy of culture, local communities will continue to receive instruction from the West concerning the embodied form of the

[87] McCormack, "Why Should Theology be Christocentric?" 64.

[88] See, for example, the various complaints concerning Gal 3:28 and the way western Christians have used this verse to declare in advance that the church is already complete in terms of its capacity to encompass difference and so the fundamental denial of difference when encountering local cultures.

gospel, the type of theological questions which need to be asked, and the proper forms of theological expression. This is also a result of the continuing financial and political power of the churches in the West, even while the dominant number of Christians now reside in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania. Priority attaches to the theologies of the western tradition, even while local questions and answers are relativised by being named "contextual theologies."

Natural theology, as a project of Christian theology and informing this account of contextualisation, is a continuation of the problem of a universal tied to some notion of the historical continuity of the gospel through the invention of a stable and coherent western culture. It is rooted within a western value system, one which shapes the very notion of the universal and of the rational. Whatever its claim to deal with a universal experience, this twentieth century illustration demonstrates those universals to be culturally derivative and reflective of local histories, stories and accounts of the nature of unity. Natural theology itself does not sit external to these stories.

Seeking a Christian Theology of Our Pre-Christian Heritage

This exercise in problematising is not to question local and indigenous experiences of the presence of God. A significant and growing Christian commentary issuing from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania make consistent claims regarding their pre-Christian cultures and histories. The denial of local cultural histories leads to the replacement of these histories with one derived the West. Without a history we are as ships without mooring—being blown by the winds, adrift on the currents and tides, swamped by the waves. The resulting "anthropological poverty," to use Mveng's phrase, underlies a wider social, political, and economic exploitation. This problem, in other words, is no mere theological abstraction; it is a clear and urgent social concern.

However, while natural theology may seem to provide a theological avenue for addressing that problem, it is built upon that same approach to the universal which undergirded the colonial enterprise. Natural theology seems to offer a solution to the question of context by validating a dim knowledge of God in pre-Christian culture. This solution itself depends upon the idea of a universal knowledge of God that is transcultural—culture does not itself inform that knowledge. The local adds nothing of material importance to our understanding of the gospel. The opposite is the case—whatever dim

knowledge of the divine each pre-Christian culture may embody, though its culture and institutions require fulfilment. The local community is to embody the gospel in a way that lies beyond its own history. In other words, though natural theology appears interested in local culture, its understanding of culture and of history succeed only in affirming a hierarchy of cultures.

There is significant theological truth at stake: local cultures do not simply conform to a universal truth irrespective of any reference to the particular realities of each culture—each local community contributes something new to our understanding of Jesus Christ.

We might formulate the problem in another way: through the question of the local embodiment of the faith. Natural theology often seeks the "intelligibility" of religious belief. In terms of Christian theology, the faith has no intelligibility apart from the lived reality of the faith. There is no abstract or disembodied Christian theology because it has to do with the livingness of God and the people gathered by this God. The claims made by the gospel concerning the service of the least, the centrality of those in the margins, the weakest being able to see and hear the truth easier than the wealthy and powerful, the fundamental equality of all peoples, the destruction of all the "natural" boundaries in Christ, is precisely not "natural" knowledge. Natural knowledge is living and structuring our lives according to a range of divisions and in the assertion of power over-against one another. The challenge always before the church is that we retreat into these natural divisions and fail to live according to the openness and generosity of the gospel. Newbigin answers this question of intelligibility by referring to the congregation as the hermeneutic of the gospel. The embodiment of the gospel, the people of God living according to non-natural grace, joy and peace of the gospel, points to the reality of God acting in history and so to the truth of that story. Contextualisation is a question of this local embodiment, and it begins as a question of continuity with our cultural past *in terms of our Christian faith*. We need a christological and pneumatological account of our pre-Christian heritage—one tied to our histories.

NATURAL THEOLOGY AND THEOLOGICAL ETHICS: APPLICATIONS IN MELANESIAN CONTEXTS

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Abstract
The reasoning approach typically seen in Catholic natural theology is a style of reasoning that proceeds by way of a proposition or propositions with consequential logical deductions. The paper briefly surveys the course of natural philosophy/theology and proceeds to argue a phenomenological manner of reasoning in identifying natural law bases for deriving theological ethics. This engages a phenomenological style of reasoning where, "phenomena" encompasses both the "physical" and the "spiritual"––leading to focus on the ways that we may discern theological ethics using inductive approaches that manifest congruency with scriptural principles. The Melanesian applications content of the paper briefly and in an exploratory way proposes examples for reconstructing theological understanding such as marriage in Melanesian contexts where marriage and family as witnessed by historical anthropology and in certain respects by current practices are refocused by a phenomenological approach to theological ethics.

Keywords
natural philosophy, natural theology, Melanesian anthropology, Melanesian religion, phenomenology, theological ethics, Papua New Guinea.

> Consider often the connection of all things in the Cosmos and their relationship with each other. For in a way all things are mutually

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> intertwined, and thus according to this there is a natural inclination, or love, that links everything together. For things follow another by reason of their attunement, to common spirit that breathes through them, and the unity of all being.[1]
>
> The commandments of the Decalogue, although accessible to reason alone, have been revealed. To attain a complete and certain understanding of the requirements of the natural law, sinful humanity needed this revelation ...[2]

INTRODUCTION

Natural theology is a difficult and abstract topic with a long and complex history that is briefly portrayed[3] as a prelude to attempting a brief exploratory contextualisation in Melanesian settings.

Brief Survey of Natural Philosophy/Natural Theology from its Beginnings through to the Scholastic/Medieval Period

The roots of natural theology are in pre-Socratic Greek philosophy that begins with observation of the harmony in nature, and then seeks to build cognitive understanding, *philosophy*.[4] From this there

[1] Marcus Aurelius, *Med.* 6.38: Πολλάκις ἐνθυμοῦ τὴν ἐπισύνδεσιν πάντων τῶν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ καὶ σχέσιν πρὸς ἄλληλα. Πρόπον γάρ τινα πάντα ἀλληλοις ἐπιπέπλεκται καὶ πάντα κατὰ τοῦτο φίλα ἀλλήλοις ἐστί: καὶ γὰρ ἄλλῳ ἐξῆς ἐστι τοῦτο διὰ τὴν τονικὴν κίνησιν καὶ σύμπνοιαν καὶ τὴν ἕνωσιν τῆς οὐσίας. Translation in J. Needleman and J. P. Piazza, *The Essential Marcus Aurelius* (London: Jeremy Tarcher/Penguin, 2008). Marcus Aurelius, emperor of Rome, 161–180, was a Stoic philosopher with no Christian adherence.

[2] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [= *CCC*], 2071: "Decalogi praecepta, quamvis soli rationi sint pervia, revelata sunt. Ad completam et certam cognitionem obtinendam exigentiarum legis naturalis, peccator genus humanum hac egebt revelatione …" English translation in *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Homebush, NSW: St Pauls, 1994).

[3] A useful compendium resource for the philosophers/philosophies discussed in the first-half of this paper is the on-line *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: <https://plato.stanford.edu/contents.html>

[4] The term "philosophy" combines one of the Greek words for "love" (φιλία – *philia*), and the word for "wisdom" (σοφία – *sophía*). In this context of the above sentence, it is worth noting that the term "physics" has displaced the earlier English nomenclature "natural philosophy". There is still an earlier physics building at University of Melbourne that has a stone banner "Natural Philosophy" over the main entry—and in that usage "natural" meant physical/phenomenal as distinct from metaphysical/noumenal.

arose a distinction between the physical and the metaphysical or alternatively between the phenomenal[5] and noumenal[6]—between that which may be "seen" and that which may "not be seen".[7] In human terms, this distinction may be between body/soul or body/spirit or body/mind/spirit/soul—with the body being regarded as "physical" or "phenomenal" and mind[8] or soul being regarded as "metaphysical" or "noumenal". This early philosophical inheritance came to be received as "metaphysical philosophy", since the ancients accepted a reality of a non-physical/non-phenomenal world and this perception undergirded later reception of their philosophy (philosophies).

With the fifth-century BC classical Greek philosopher Socrates, metaphysical philosophy became essentially metaphysical *moral* philosophy focusing on "the good". This focus on "the good" was on what are referred to as "forms" or "ideas" or "principles". We are dependent upon the younger fifth-century Plato as a student of Socrates for the written inheritance of the teaching of his master—thus the term, Platonic philosophy.[9] It is from the third-century AD classical Greek philosopher Plotinus that we have Neoplatonism, in which the Socratic idea of forms shifted from a mental (*nous*) or cognitive[10] form to a theocratic articulation and it is this shift that

[5] The term comes into English through Latin but with its root being Greek, *phainein* ("to show", "to appear"); i.e., that which may be observed.

[6] The term comes into English from the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and derives from Greek, ωοῖεν – *noien* ("apprehend" or "conceive"), which in Kantian usage refers to knowledge or understanding that is apprehended other than by empirical observation, such as perceiving a spiritual presence.

[7] The commonplace term "see" is placed in inverted commas because there are many things that are not visible to the naked eye (such as gaseous composition or cellular composition) that nevertheless are "phenomenal", i.e., they may be comprehended and observed using natural or technological instruments (the eye an example or the former, the microscope an example of the latter). I shall use the terms physical/metaphysical and phenomenal/noumenal without introducing subtle distinctions between this dichotomisation.

[8] This engages a distinction between "mind" and "brain".

[9] A searching yet succinct and contemporary exposition of "the good" is found in Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

[10] The term "cognitive" derives from Latin *cognoscere*, dealing with empirical or practical knowing/knowledge, but that now mainly takes in English a meaning of reasoned mental processes that are not necessarily linked with empiricism.

provided the foundation for a metaphysical moral *theology*[11] (rather than simply a metaphysical moral *philosophy*).

The eminent fourth-century BC Greek philosopher Aristotle saw the soul as the principle of the life of the body and in that perspective developed a moral philosophy that focused on a virtue ethics (a sense of inherent moral lawfulness as distinct from prescriptive "deontic ethics").[12] However, it was not until much later that Aristotelian method found development in the moral theology by St Thomas Aquinas (thirteenth century). The formative and magisterial influence on the emergence of medieval Latin scholastic metaphysical theology and metaphysical moral theology principally drew upon St Augustine of Hippo (fourth century). It was within this inheritance that St Anselm of Canterbury (eleventh century) introduced Platonic cosmology to first articulate the ontological proof of the necessary existence of God as a sophisticated noumenal/cognitive/metaphysical theology.[13] St Thomas Aquinas, later revered as the greatest medieval theologian, applied a method of demonstrating an analogous relationship between creation (as effect) and God (as cause). His moral applications involved inductive *a posteriori*[14] and causal reasoning that was less-engaged in "philosophical proofs" and more engaged in Aristotelian method now ascribed as "virtue ethics".[15]

[11] The term "theology" combines the Greek words for God (θεός – *theos*), and a complex term that may be read as "rational ideation" (λόγος – logos). (Evidently, the latter term is not here used in the way that it is used in John 1:14.)

[12] Amplified in n. 47 below.

[13] The terms "ontology"/"ontological" refer to the nature of being or "*is*-ness" and combine two Greek words, ὄντος – *ontos* ("that which is"), and λογία, here used in the sense of "logical discourse". The method of Anselm was one of a reasoning from premise or *a priori* reasoning.

[14] *A posteriori* reasoning is distinguished from *a priori* reasoning in that the latter refers to deductive reasoning involving necessary conclusions from first premises, while the former involves inductive conclusions that follow from observations.

[15] For a standard reference see J. A. K. Thomson (trans.), rev. Hugh Tredennick, with introduction by Jonathan Barnes, *Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics*, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 2004). For a contemporary interpretation see Nancy E. Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

Beginning Contextualisation of Natural Philosophy/Natural Theology in Melanesian Settings

Natural theology as a topic has particular difficulty in Melanesian contexts. Across a long history of Greek philosophy from pre-Socratic times to natural theology in Latin Christendom there emerges a dichotomous worldview[16] between "material" and "spiritual"/or "physical" and "metaphysical"/or "phenomenal" and noumenal". As already noted, this may be simply stated as between what may be "seen" and what may "not be seen". The program for the 2019 MATS conference, for which this paper was prepared, proposed an understanding of natural theology in terms of "observation of nature and the use of human reason". Across the history of natural theology, the focus has often been on the "not seen"—on the *metaphysical*. The "observation of nature" is more typical of later manifestations of natural philosophy/natural theology since the Renaissance/Reformation periods, where the focus becomes more on the "seen"—on the *physical*.

A non-dichotomous or holistic perspective that suffuses the "material" and the "spiritual" is more characteristic of indigenous Melanesian cultures.[17] Further, the "human reason" of philosophy or theology proceeding in a singularly metaphysical manner has typically been of an abstract intellectualist kind. This is clearly seen in the eleventh-century articulation of the ontological proof proposed by Anselm of Canterbury.[18] His method renders a

[16] References to "world" and to "worldview" in this paper refer not to our planet, earth, but to the mental/cultural environment in which we live, and "worldview" conveys these often implicit understandings of "worlds" and "worldviews".

[17] See P. A. McGavin, "Epistemology and Pastoral Practice: Applications in Melanesian Contexts," *MJT* 34 (2016): 58–60. This is expressed by Simeon B. Namunu, "Melanesian Religion, Ecology, and Modernization in Papua New Guinea," in *Indigenous Traditions and Ecology: The Interbeing of Cosmology and Community* (John S. Grim, ed.; Religions of the World and Ecology; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 149–280, at 251, as "… The ecosystem is not merely a system of natural phenomena within the environment, but includes spiritual phenomena."

[18] His thesis may be found in *Monologion* 3, and in *Proslogion* 2, respectively written about 1075 and 1077 (Brian Davies and G. R. Evans [eds], *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* [Oxford World's Classics; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998], 5–81 and 82–104). The ontological proof is typically exposited with reference to his second version. For convenient web-based

cognitive articulation and integration that has typically been represented as drawing upon the text of Romans 1:20[19] to build an intricate premise/logical reasoning[20] to "prove" the *necessity* of God. It is this manner of reasoning that is captured in the first sentence of the promotional poster for the 2019 MATS conference: "Natural theology is generally described as the endeavour to attain understanding of God and His relationship with the universe by way of human reason." This manner of naming of human reason implies a different paradigm than the overarching paradigm of both the Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament (NT), paradigms that are predicated upon the revelatory action of God and upon witness to the revelatory action of God (in the OT such as with Abraham and with the exodus, and in the NT with the conception, life, death, resurrection, and ascension/glorification of Jesus the Christ).

The achievements of medieval scholasticism as represented by Anselm may be termed "speculative" philosophy or philosophical theology, and this again presents a manner of human reasoning that is strange to indigenous Melanesian mentalities. During the medieval era and also the early Enlightenment era, the "speculative" manner of reasoning involved an abstract premise or premises and consequent logical deductions, reasoning that I term "propositional reasoning" or "syllogistic reasoning". Such a one-sided manner of thinking is also difficult for indigenous Melanesian mentalities (and also does not fit well with my manner of thinking!).

Natural Philosophy/Natural Theology from Enlightenment to Modern Periods and Melanesian Contexts

Moving from the medieval period and its antecedents, and into the era termed the Enlightenment, represents another methodological

expositions see <https://www.iep.utm.edu/ont-arg/#H3> and <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40230655?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents>

[19] "Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. Therefore [unbelievers of God] are without excuse." I say "typically been represented", because Rom 1:20 itself is more in an *a postiriori* mode.

[20] By "premise/logical" reasoning, I mean a reasoning that begins with a premise (or proposition) from which there proceeds a series of logical steps (logical deductions) to give a conclusion, such as, "Therefore, O man, thou art without excuse!" Elsewhere, I name this as *syllogistic* reasoning or *propositional* reasoning.

and perspectual shift that focuses on "human reason". The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century philosopher René Descartes is generally considered as the vanguard of the Enlightenment with his often-quoted dictum, *cognito ergo sum* ("I think, therefore I am").[21] Although Descartes reckoned himself as a Christian, theologically he is better described as a Deist.[22] His is a speculative theology of a metaphysical philosophical kind involving cognitive processes that I have described as "syllogistic". Later writers of the Enlightenment developed further formulations and contra-formulations of cosmological/theological understandings—the most notable being the eighteenth-century philosopher Immanuel Kant. He proposed categorical imperatives as a basis of moral theology—a *moral imperative* or lawfulness as the basis of reason and reality.[23]

In part, Kant was contesting the ideas of the eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher David Hume, who laid the foundations for empiricism, which grapples with observed behaviours[24] rather than inherent normative standards such as proposed in the categorical imperative reasoned system of Kant. The empiricism of Hume provided a foundation for later Utilitarians, led by the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British philosopher Jeremy Bentham[25] and in the nineteenth century by John Steward Mill.[26] Bentham expounded the maximisation/optimisation of human satisfaction or "utility" as the basis for evaluation of human actions. Mill articulated a positivist empiricist method[27] that influenced the development of inductive empirical reasoning as a scientific method.

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[21] From his 1637 *Discourse on Method* and his 1644 *Principles of Philosophy*.
[22] Deism treats God as a "first cause" of the universe (not in itself wrong) but does not attribute an ongoing interaction with the universe—and thus lacks a sufficient sense of ongoing divine providence and of divine action and continuing action in salvation.
[23] *Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781.
[24] *Treatise of Human Nature*, 1738.
[25] *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, published in 1789.
[26] *A System of Logic*, published in 1843.
[27] Positivist method purportedly is based on observable natural phenomena, with information derived from sensory experience and interpreted through reason and logic, and rejects introspective and intuitive knowledge because metaphysical and theological claims cannot by verified by sense experience.

This positivist method provided foundations for the modern development of the social sciences that are premised upon relative valuation—rather than Kantian notions of categorical imperative or upon notions of "the good" deriving from classical metaphysical speculative moral philosophy/moral theology. It is the inheritances of utilitarian worldviews that have generally prevailed into the recent modern period, as manifested in the dominant relativism of contemporary international society (societies), where absolute norms are receding and where valuation is dominantly situationist and relativist.[28]

To the extent that these intellectual shifts across the Enlightenment and early Modern period or periods sustained propositional reasoning, they are probably better named as "natural *philosophy*" rather than "natural *theology*"—since the emerging "observational" or "empirical" approach generally focuses on the "material"/"physical", with little attention to or with even disregard of the "spiritual". These more recent versions of one-sidedness present further difficulties for Melanesian mentalities (and another difficulty for the author's mentality!) that is further explored in the next section.

DIVERTING ONE-SIDED AND DICHOTOMOUS SCHEMAS

There is a strong trait across Christian history that makes difficult the recognition of the insidiousness of dichotomous and/or one-sided reasonings, namely, the undercurrent in Christian history of a dichotomy/duality between "body" (σῶμα – *soma*), and "spirit" (πνεῦμα – *pneuma*) or "body" (*soma*) and "soul" (ψυκή – *psuke*). This dichotomy/duality and/or a one-sidedness is manifest where the "body" is located as the root of *sin*, whereas a proper understanding of the human person as body/soul/spirit encompasses a *holistic recognition* of "sin", rather than a compartmentalised or reductive attribution of "sin". This one-sided perspective may be instanced in

[28] For a virtue ethics critique of situationist arguments, see P. A. McGavin and T. A. Hunter, "The *We Believe* of Philosophers: Implicit Epistemologies and Unexamined Psychologies," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 54 (2014): 279–96. http://www.pdcnet.org/pdc/bvdb.nsf/purchase?openform&fp=ipq&id=ipq_2014_0054_0003_0279_0296

the way that the Genesis episode has often been represented, where the "apple" ("the fruit of the tree") presents a materiality that appeals to the body/flesh ("is good to eat"), while the crux of the sin is in the realm of will/spirit, "to be like God" (Gen 3:1–6). In brief, sin correctly should be located holistically, in the whole of human nature, in the whole person, or the whole society. A corollary of failure to grasp this theological and historical fact is a weakening of the historical and theological fact of the holistic human nature that is assumed by the eternal Word as Jesus of Nazareth. We cannot speak of Jesus with accuracy without an anthropology of body/spirit or body/soul,[29] and without an anthropology/theology of body/soul/divinity. Applied to "natural theology", this entails our engaging "human reasoning" across "physical" *and* "metaphysical" realms.

Such a fundamental recognition diverts us from a natural theology of a one-sided metaphysical philosophy kind, with its roots in the way that early Greek philosophy was received in the development of the natural theology of the Middle Ages and the early Enlightenment era as a kind of "speculative theology". Holistic approaches also divert us away from the natural philosophy of the later Enlightenment as developed by the Utilitarians as a manner of reasoning that locates human welfare in the optimisation of human satisfaction or "utility" that is generally understood "materialistically". We need a natural philosophy and a natural theology that addresses the welfare of the human person and human society—of the *whole* human person (body and spirit or body and soul) and a *holistic* understanding of human society. The line of argument in this paper proposes a holistic anthropology and holistic worldviews and leads toward versions of phenomenological

[29] More fully stated, body/mind/soul/spirit. Mind (νοῦς – *nous*) in contemporary science is typically equated or conflated with brain, while soul (*psuke*) is often ignored. In strict terms when speaking about the humanity of Jesus we should refer to his *human nature*, while the term *anthropology* should be used only of human persons (the person of Jesus being at once human *and* divine).

philosophy/theology congruent[30] with non-dualistic mentalities.[31] Especially in relation to Melanesian cultural contexts, there remains another critical defect in received natural philosophy/natural theology that is clarified across the following two sections.

TRANSITION TO MORAL PHILOSOPHY/MORAL THEOLOGY

By the Socratic era, the development of natural philosophy progressed toward a single goal, the form specified as "the good", a goal that with Plotinus shifted from a cognitive or mental (*nous*) form to a theocratic articulation that provided the foundation for a metaphysical moral *theology* (rather than a metaphysical moral *philosophy*). Whether in philosophy as the form of "the good" or in theology as "God" (*theos*), we are dealing with metaphysical reasoning that engages either a single *cause* or a single end (*telos*), namely, a *divine cause* and a *divine end*. This manner of engaging a reasonable cause and a reasonable end is critical to the attribution of *lawfulness*, and thus to "natural philosophy"/"natural theology" that is a metaphysical *moral philosophy* or a metaphysical *moral theology*. I here name "moral" in the sense of "lawful". As I shall later amplify, this engages metaphysical reckoning that is not arbitrary, but is *lawful*, *and* engages physical reckoning is not arbitrary, but is *lawful*. Thus—as shall be amplified—we deal with

[30] The wording "congruent" is crucial and is different from the "proof" language of syllogistic philosophical theology of the "ontological proof" or "categorical imperative" kinds. These proceed by way of the logic of premise and deductive argumentation, while phenomenology proceeds inductively by way of consistency of evidence. This latter method increasingly characterises a contemporary Catholic approach—such as most recently seen in the espousal of a framework of "listen", "reason", "propose" as a "methodology" for presenting a holistic appreciation of natural moral law as inscribed in human nature. See Congregation for Catholic Education, *"Male and Female He Created Them": Toward a Path of Dialogue on the Questions of Gender Theory and Education* (Vatican City, 10 June 2019), nos 4 and 30–32).

[31] Development of natural law understandings in Catholicism along these lines is represented by the International Theological Commission, *In Search of a Universal Ethic: A New Look at Natural Law* (Vatican City, 2009): <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20090520_legge-naturale_en.html>

metaphysical theology that entails *moral* lawfulness; and we deal with physical philosophy/theology that entails *moral* lawfulness.[32]

Transitions to Contemporary Social Sciences Understandings of Lawfulness

As outlined above, the early Enlightenment inheritors of medieval natural theology influenced a transition in moral philosophy/moral theology toward what they reckoned as "inductive" (although in certain respects it remained "syllogistic") and that also was "lawful". During the later Enlightenment era we encounter philosophers who professed Christianity—yet of a deistic kind—and who promoted perspectives where human values were understood in terms described as "Utilitarian".[33] This perspective in turn gave rise during the early Modern period to the development of "social sciences" continuing into the contemporary era, where there is a "lawfulness", even if it only one of "utility".

I need now to state the sharp-end of this compressed survey of natural philosophy/natural theology argumentation, namely, the predicate of a single rational cause and a coherent rational end (or set of ends). Simply stated, this is a predicate of <u>one</u> *creator* God

[32] Second Vatican Council, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et spes*) (1965), no. 36: "For by the very circumstance of their having been created [by God], all things are endowed with their own stability, truth, goodness, proper laws and order. Man must respect these as he isolates them by the appropriate methods of the individual sciences or arts. Therefore if methodical investigation within every branch of learning is carried out in a genuinely scientific manner and in accord with moral norms, it never truly conflicts with faith, for earthly matters and the concerns of faith derive from the same God. Indeed, whoever labours to penetrate the secrets of reality with a humble and steady mind, even though he is unaware of the fact, is nevertheless being led by the hand of God, who holds all things in existence, and gives them their identity" (*The documents of Vatican II with Notes and Index: Vatican Translation* [Vaticn City: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2009). An alternative and succinct catechetical statement is from *CCC*, 2500: "… God reveals himself to him [man] through the universal language of creation … the order and harmony of the cosmos …"

[33] Discourse from this later-Enlightenment/early modern period often used the term "good" (or, in more contemporary discourse, "goods and services"). Such usage does not relate to or does not directly relate to a *moral* sense of "good" nor to a Platonic sense of "the good", and "utility" may simply convey a "descriptive" status and not convey a "normative" status.

with one *end* or a unified *set of ends*. Without this predicate and without engagement of a logical reasoning process, one *does not have* "natural philosophy" or "natural theology" in the intellectual traditions that I have portrayed.[34]

Lack of Correspondence in the Backdrop of Natural Philosophy/Natural Theology with the Backdrop of Traditional Melanesian Worldviews

It follows from my argumentation as brought to a sharp point in the last paragraph of the preceding section that "natural philosophy"/"natural theology" entails rational reasoning that proceeds from a predicate of a lawfulness in creation that follows from a prior predicate of a single and beneficent creator, namely, *one God*. The fact, however, is that the world of classical Greece did not share those predicates, it was a world of polytheism and of contesting gods.[35] A further fact is that the world of Augustine of Hippo who engaged neo-Platonic inheritances in constructing what became a Latin theological inheritance also lived in the chaotic world of a failing Roman empire with a divine emperor and also with polytheism and contesting gods.

In contrast with the worldviews as I have portrayed in the development of received natural theology, indigenous Melanesian cultural inheritances had/have multiple gods/spirits in relations that may be beneficent or malevolent.[36] That is, customary Melanesian

[34] This recognition is neatly captured in a different perspective by Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (London: Penguin, 1993), 392: "Anselm's formulation [of the ontological proof] emerges from a context of deep [Catholic Christian] belief and disciplined [monastic] spirituality, and may be seen as a clarified or academic summary of what is already known, rather than as an argument to be put to an outsider". This is especially true of an outsider in customary Melanesian culture.

[35] I here speak in terms of the general reception of classical Greek thinking, whereas on more sophisticated readings, polytheistic gods could be read as "secondary causes" while acknowledging a single unifying "first cause".

[36] The Melanesian anthropological record clearly attests to the absence of "uniform patterns of belief systems about deities/spirits in relation to Melanesian cosmologies and mythologies". See G. W. Trompf, *Melanesian Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 12–19; Namunu, "Melanesian Religion," 260; and E. L. Kwa, "The Role of Traditional Knowledge in Achieving Sustainable Economic Development,"

cultures prior to experiences of Christianisation never embraced a single beneficent creator.[37] These observations serve to reinforce the revelatory origins for monotheism and for divine beneficence, and, thus, to a *revelatory foundation* of the received natural philosophy/natural theology inheritance.

I subscribe to natural philosophy/natural theology, but in a manner that nests that philosophy/theology in a revelatory context or revelatory contexts—namely the revelatory contexts that the church names as the Old Dispensation (Covenant) and the New Dispensation (Covenant) in naming God as Father—and linked with the revelatory consummation in the life, death, resurrection, and glorification of the Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Acknowledging this revelatory backdrop clarifies appropriate approaches for contemporary natural theology research and practice, and provides a foundation for proceeding to a Christian natural philosophy/natural theology that may be proclaimed in Melanesian contexts and lived in Melanesian cultural congruity.

<https://www.academia.edu/15192648/_The_Role_of_Traditional_Knowledge_in_Achieving_Sustainable_Economic_Development_>, 14, who writes: "The common thread that runs across this body of [Melanesian anthropological literature] is the call to revisit the diverse and unique traditional cultures of PNG …", while Namunu, *Melanesian Religions*, 252, more portrays the beneficence of Melanesian cosmic relationality; and G. W. Trompf, *Payback: The Logic of Retribution in Melanesian Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), portrays a harsher perspective on the construction of balance/relationality in Melanesian cultures.

[37] The scriptural inheritance is complex, and contains misconstructions of the God-of-kinship that is grounded in the confession of "…the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and Jacob" and successive covenantal relations, but constructions/misconstructions that are given universal repositioning in later OT prophetic texts such as Isa 66:19–20; Zech 8:23; and Tob 13:11. There nevertheless is a stark contrast with Melanesian conceptions of origin that are rooted in local past human lineages, rather than from outside-lineage in an eternal creator; and, in further contrast, where scriptural lineage origins are set in a wider "known world" that stretches beyond specific locality across a geographic sweep that may now be described as the Near East. An interesting exposition of Israelite transition from tribal to universal perspectives in religion is found in R. Firestone, "A Jewish Response to Christian Theology of Religions," in *Twenty-First Century Theologies of Religions: Retrospection and Future Prospects*, ed. Elizabeth Harris, aul Hedges, and Shanthikumar Hettiarachchi (Current of Encounter 54; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), 309–27, at 311–25.

A Holistic and Immanentist Natural Theology

The premise for natural theology in the era of Christendom—and as already noticed in the reasoning premise for Anselm—was that God's "eternal power and deity has been clearly perceived … [and thus those who do not believe in God] are *without excuse*" (Rom 1:20, emphasis added).[38] This is not a reasonable premise in traditional Melanesian cultural contexts. Although not a complete paradigm, the Areopagus address of St Paul is more suited as a basis for proclamation and reasoning in Melanesian contexts:

> Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, "To an unknown god". What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you (Acts 17:22–23).

Some amplification is needed for Melanesian contexts that may or may not have devotional shrines in the manner of the Athenians, although Melanesians may be observed to engage in respectful and reciprocal deferences to spirits/ancestors,[39] and they will not have an altar inscribed "to an unknown god". The point of this Areopagus address is an appeal engaging an "unknown" in Melanesian cultures: "The God who made the world and everything in it … is not far from each of us …" (Acts 17:24 and 27–28). Such a manner of appeal is distinct in that the proclamation is of a creation—a primal creation that precedes cognizance of ancestral inheritances and/or presences—and claims a *single origin* for the cosmological and ecological order in which human societies are situated. What has

[38] A perspective that is implicit across the entire OT, for example: "the whole earth is full of God's glory" (Isa 6:3b).

[39] On the pervasive reciprocal transactions between spirit/ancestors and living kin, see A. L. Crawford, *AIDA: Life and Ceremony of the Gogadala* (Port Moresby: National Cultural Council of Papua New Guinea, 1981), 187–88; Namunu, "Melanesian Religions," 251–52. R. R. Wilk, *Economics and Cultures: Foundations of Economic Anthropology* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), 7–8, in giving an introduction and overview of "economic anthropology", succinctly makes an observation that is generally recognised in Melanesian anthropology, that the generally "reciprocal" nature of Melanesian sociality is reflected in Melanesian religions/spiritualities. See L. Tom, "Dedication to Idolatrous Worship in Acts 17:22–23 and Implications for Dialogue between the Gospel and Melanesian Religions," *MJT* 35 (2019): 81–104.

congruence with Melanesian spiritual/cultural sensibilities is that such a manner of appeal at once conveys an *immanence* of God, who while yet remaining "above" the created order that is God's handiwork, nevertheless is *present within* an ordered worldview, within a created order.

The significance in Melanesian contexts is that in respect of human persons and human societies, such a created order is *both* "physical" *and* "metaphysical".[40] That is, human persons and human society/societies and human environments are structured both "physically" *and* "metaphysically".[41] That is, persons are integrally both body and soul (or body and spirit); and societies likewise have both organisational and relational forms that may be observed in the usual sensory manners *and also* structural forms where observation is engaged differently from the usual sensory manners—that is, persons and societies have both "physical" or "phenomenal" aspects *and* "metaphysical" or "noumenal" aspects. And—crucially in Melanesian cultural contexts—this recognition is *holistic*, rather

[40] There is a difficulty in the above sentence insofar as Melanesian identity is not so focused on individuals ("persons", nor on "humankind") as on kinship/community—as somewhat captured by the *Tok Pisin* (Pidgin English) term *wontok* ("one talk"; that is, persons of the same language/kinship language group). In brief, identity is intensely relational and relationality less takes a nuclear family focus (see Namunu, "Indigenous Religion," 279, n. 42 for a typical amplification). Further, this identity relationality extends ecologically (for example, Namunu, "Indigenous Religion," 258, 261, and 263). Yet further, this "social ecology" is manifested in characteristic clan identification of environmental property rights: see Namunu, "Indigenous Religion," 252, 258, and 263; L. T. Jones and P. A. McGavin, *Land Mobilisation in Papua New Guinea* (Canberra: Asia Pacific Press, 2001); and C. Filer and M. Macintyre, "Grass Roots and Deep Holes: Community Responses to Mining in Melanesia," *The Contemporary Pacific* 18 (2006):215–31. This is relationality reflected in the sentence "human persons and *human societies*" in the text above.

[41] As Namunu, "Melanesian Religion", 249, contends, "… Spirits and ecology are part of a single, complex Melanesian vision of life". Trompf, *Payback*, 105, speaks of "… the seamless fabric of traditional society". See also Bernard M. Narokobi, "What is Religious Experience for a Melanesian?" in *Christ in Melanesia: Exploring Theological Issues*, Point Series (ed. James Knight; Goroka, PNG: Melanesian Istitute for Pastoral and Economic Services, 1977), 8–9: "… 'Life' is not limited by material things nor by earthly existence, but is preeminently pneumatic and numinous … [and] intrinsic to this view is the belief in personal spirits."

than dichotomous. That is, in Melanesian mentalities there is not a cleft between the "physical" human person and the "metaphysical" human person; between present human persons and their ancestral spirits; and likewise not a cleft between the "physical" human society and the "metaphysical" human society, between "physical" worlds and "metaphysical" worlds.[42]

A further nuance in using this Acts text as a reference point is recognition that the Athenian gods were not necessarily universal, and often were specific to that particular culture. Likewise, and with added emphasis, the spiritual pantheon of Melanesians is *not universal*—it is specific to ancestral narratives of particular kinship groups and their geographic boundaries. The plethora of languages that is characteristic of Melanesia, and as so exemplified in Papua New Guinea, witnesses that there is not commonality in the naming of kinship spiritual pantheons[43]—they are largely particular to each kinship/language group and acknowledged in particular reciprocal and ecological relations between kinship domains, kinship ancestors, and present kin.[44] An ecological/spiritual/theological perspective informed by the Acts text places the local Melanesian spiritual/physical worldviews/inheritances in larger perspectives—that locate local physical/spiritual worldviews in a universal context, and a context that has a universal provenance and governance that

[42] This is contrary to a Kantian [and contemporary "positivist"] view where "… cognitional activity is restricted to a world of possible experience and that [is] a world not of metaphysical realities but of sensible phenomena," as expressed by J. A. Allen, "Bernard Lonergan's View of Natural Knowledge of God,", *HJ* 59 (2018): 484–96, at 487, and quoting, B. Lonergan, "Natural Knowledge of God," in W. F. J. Ryan and B. J. Tyrrell (eds), *A Second Collection: Papers* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 117–33, at 122.

[43] The local nature of the spiritual world is reflected in the range of vernacular terms used to describe practices of sorcery and witchcraft that relate to such beliefs: *puri puri*, *mura mura*, *dikana*, *vada*, and *mea mea* that is now commonly expressed in *Tok Pisin* and in English as *sanguma*. See Miranda Forsyth and Richard Eves (eds), *Talking it Through: Responses to Sorcery and Witchcraft Beliefs and Practices in Melanesia* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2015), 4.

[44] In most Western usages, "ecology" tends to refer to physical environments, while in Melanesian usages "ecology" is better understood holistically as embracing physical and social and noumenal environments—for example, see Namunu, "Melanesian Religion," 252, 259, and 261; and Tompf, *Payback*, 138, who speaks of "the 'ecology of religion' as a whole".

was "*un*known to them [to you]" (Acts 17:23). This is distinct from the worldview of Natural Theology proceeding from the typical reading of the Romans text—and invites a proclamation and recognition of an "unknown", "… in whom we live and move and have our being…" (Acts 17:28). Such a proclamation of an "unknown" portrays divinity as a giver, "not in need of anything" (Acts 17:25), yet nevertheless with a nearness that is congruent with Melanesian holistic and immanentist worldviews.

HOLISTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHOD OF NATURAL PHILOSOPHY/NATURAL THEOLOGY

As with persons, human societies are both "material" and "spiritual", and like persons the "material" and the "spiritual" are viewed or should be viewed *holistically*. I have spoken of "viewing" or of "observing"—and this is of "phenomena" that is *both* "material" *and* "spiritual". Where such observing is systemic—rather than impressions or episodic—the process may be named "phenomenological". That is, the argument is toward a "natural theology" method introduced in the abstract of this paper as "phenomenological method"—where "phenomena" are viewed holistically, embracing and integrating the observances of material and spiritual phenomena and discerning an ordering, a connaturality, an intelligibility, or a *lawfulness* across and between these domains.[45]

[45] The term "connaturality" is drawn from a 1992 paper by Joseph Ratzinger, "If You Want Peace: Conscience and Truth", *Values in a Time of Upheaval* (trans. Brian McNeil; Eng. edn; New York: Crossroads, 2006), 75–100, at 92–93. The term "intelligibility" was suggested by Emeritus Professor John Kleinig in email communication (1 August 2019). A very apposite point is made by Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 202 and 265, where she speaks of "different procedures and methods of verification" across different disciplines (such as philosophy and anthropology). As a cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural scholar, I concur with her observation on 203 in respect of different manners of argumentation and modes of reflection "… [as these] belong to different disciplines and universes of discourse are not easily related to one another". A sense of multi-perspectual discourse/discernment is expounded in, P. A. McGavin, "Metaphors and 'Doing Theology'," *ACR* 96 (2019): 66–82. For particular applications to Melanesian contexts and in epistemological terms, see McGavin, "Epistemology and Pastoral Practice," 1–11.

Such a holistic perspective is also a more correct reading of scriptural anthropology (something I argue elsewhere, but cannot amplify here)—as well as being a perspective more congruent with Melanesian mentalities. Further, where a holistic phenomenological approach is set in a context of "The God who made the world and everything in it … and is not far from each one of us …" (Act 17:24 and 27), there follows an appreciation that the created order—both "physical" and "metaphysical"—is intelligible as being *lawful*. That is, the lawfulness of the created order is not only true of "physical"/"material" realms, but also is true of "metaphysical"/"spiritual" realms. It also follows that in adopting such holistic phenomenological perspectives we may observe inductively an ordering or lawfulness of human persons and of human societies.[46] It is in this holistic phenomenological sense of "natural philosophy"/"natural theology" that we can by inductive means engage processes by which we discern "lawfulness" in respect of human persons and human societies—that is, discern *theological ethics*.

Examples from Physical and Metaphysical Natural Order

From the perspective of a physician or a public health professional, inductive observations allow discernment of the *laws for bodily health*—for example, moderate the consumption of saturated-fat foods to avoid vascular and cardiac disease; and *laws for societal health*—for example, draining still-water located near domestic areas to avoid the social incidences of malarial infection. Adopting such a holistic perspective toward persons and societies correspondingly enables inductive discernment of *laws for personal spiritual health* and *laws for societal spiritual health*[47]—for

[46] This position was neatly expressed in a 1996 interview in German subsequently published in English by Joseph Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth: Christianity and the Catholic Church at the End of the Millennium, An Interview with Peter Seewald* (trans. Adrian Walker; San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007), 231: "Not only nature has its order, its form of life that we have to heed if we want to live by and in it, man too is essentially a creature and has a creaturely order."

[47] In a different manner of expression, allows inductive discernment of a *holistic* "*human ecology*".

example, sexual profligacy entails degeneration of the spiritual life of persons and societies, quite apart from the material personal and social impacts of sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

In brief, cognitive and practical appropriation of belief in one creator God by persons and societies entails holistic appreciation of lawfulness across both physical and metaphysical realms. In respect of the metaphysical realm, this may be stated in *moral* terms—that certain personal and social attitudes and behaviours are "good", while certain personal and social attitudes and behaviours are "bad". I prefer the nomenclature of *ethics* to the nomenclature of *morals*.[48] That is, there are personal and social attitudes and behaviours that are "ethical" and personal and social attitudes and behaviours that are "unethical". Where the perspective is "theological"—rather than simply "philosophical"—we may thus speak of "theological ethics", as in the title of this paper. And, further, we may speak of theological ethics where the manner of ethical discernment is holistic and *inductive*, rather than deductive and reductionist (as has been more characteristic of "moral theology").[49]

A non-inductive method is of the "*Thou shalt*"/"*Thou shalt not*" kind, and this is termed *deontic* morality[50]—and a "deontic"

[48] The terms are similar, with morals deriving from Latin, *moralis*, and ethics deriving from Greek, ἠθική – *ethike*, but the connotations surrounding usage have differed over time. It is common nowadays for organisations to refer to "ethics" in the sense of "ethical practice", where "ethics" is used as a header for "codes of conduct". Such usages are often better named as "protocols"—as typically they specifying procedural courses of action and/or prescribed action pathways. Such rule-based and externally imposed written standards and guidelines involve weak recourse to virtue ethics and capture deontic moral perspectives (see next footnote). Typically, they are contemporary secular expressions of an earlier "manualist tradition" that prevailed in moral theology. Admittedly, the terms "moral theology" and "theological ethics" overlap and the distinctions drawn may have as much to do with tone, as with substance—yet the prescriptive tone of manualist approaches, both earlier and contemporary, is more akin to "morals" than to "ethics". The term "virtue" derives from the Latin *virtus* ("worth" or "merit" that inheres, rather than is prescribed) (thus, "virtue ethics").

[49] Joseph Ratzinger, "The Renewal of Moral Theology: Perspectives of Vatican II and *Veritatis Splendor*," *Communio* 32 (2005): 357–368, at 358, portrayed moral theology prior to the Second Vatican Council as "characterised by the rationalism of the manualist tradition".

[50] Derived from Greek for "duty" or "obligation", δέον –*deon*, whose root is "right", *dei* (not to be confused with Latin of the same lettering). The main focus of OT

approach is not in the realm of "natural theology" in the manner proposed in this paper.[51] Natural theology/natural philosophy that has a holistic perspective involves discernment in an "inductive" manner across phenomenal *and* noumenal worlds. That is, we learn a lawfulness by holistic *observation*. Further, this does not necessarily mean "individual or individualistic observation"—we carry social memories and traditions that upon careful examination and reasoning may be seen to be "wise", may be seen to act as transmitters of holistic lawfulness for persons and for societies.

Difficulties in Theological Ethics Discernments

Sometimes theological ethics discernments may be difficult, may take time, and may involve the affirmation or the rejection of indigenous customs and/or rejection of imported customs.[52] In this respect, relations between men and women and understandings of marriage and family are pointed examples (that for reasons of space are here only outlined).[53] When Christian missionaries first came to

ethics is of the "thou shalt"/"thou shalt not" kind—in contrast with NT ethics that are mainly *virtue* ethics (from Latin *virtutem*, moral strength or character). The Beatitudes (Matt 5:1–12; and Luke 6:2–26) are *descriptive* of virtue ethics *states* ("blessed are the poor in spirit") rather than of virtue ethics *behaviours*. The Pauline corpus is dominated by virtue ethics—such as "love, joy, peace …" (Gal 5:22). In a scriptural context it is worth noting Jesus' words, "I am the way [*hodós*]" that *hodós* derives from ὁδος – *hodos*, which also has the sense of "right": that is, Jesus presents himself not simply as "*a* way" but as "*the* [right] way". And, although the NT gives witness to Jesus' taking-up and fulfilling "the [Mosaic] law", it is virtue ethics that dominate the witness to Jesus' teaching.

[51] The confluence of natural and revelatory aspects is acknowledged in *CCC*, 2071, as cited at the head and at the end of this paper. Nevertheless, a complication has to be reckoned with in that received Catholic manners of reasoning that are claimed as "natural theology" typically have been exercises in propositional reasoning of a syllogistic kind, and *not* natural theology as argued in this paper.

[52] Namunu, "Melanesian Religion", 280, n. 57, makes a similar observation: "Where there are such things as noble traditions in Melanesia, then we have to look for them within the culture of the Melanesian people … [and this will involve being] able to distinguish between the noble and the ignoble aspects of their traditional customs [and to] discard the ignoble ones and hold onto the noble ones….". See also McGavin, "Epistemology and Pastoral Practice," 62–64.

[53] An example of this moral discourse/discernment in respect of education is seen in P. A. McGavin, "Conversing on Ethics, Morality, and Education," *Journal of Moral Education* 42 (2013): 494–511.

what is now the Gulf Province of Papua New Guinea, there were "long houses" where men and pubescent boys gathered in socialities from which women and girls were excluded, and—although distinct ethnographically—analogous "long house" cultures also occurred in Sepik areas. Another example is from the area now named as Hela Province, where the hut of a man was separate from the hut of a woman, and where cohabitation focused on the generation of children, rather than mutuality in man/woman relations. In the past and into the present, we also widely observe in Melanesian cultures marked segmentations in the work lives of men and of women—even to the point, for example, where in some areas some crops may be "men's crops" and others only "women's crops". My readers/hearers could multiply examples—but it is evident that in traditional Melanesian cultures there was not a unified understanding of relationships between men and women, of the family, and of masculine and feminine roles and identities (nowadays often referred to as "genders").

A lack of unified understanding in these respects is also observed as we move to contemporary society—I have had research assistants from areas evangelised by the Catholic Church and who might be described as "cultural Catholics" whose manners of forming a family or of not forming a family more reflected what is now prevalent with the loss of Christian values in what is termed "western society".

Such evidence of apparent stability and viability in personal and social values across contemporary societies and across segmented customary societies indicate that—without acute discernments—phenomenological methods may not give more insights than those of cultural anthropologists and ethnographers, whose researches are partial and/or merely descriptive, rather than robustly holistic. Inducing an appreciation of genuine human ecologies recalls my earlier remarks that revelatory backdrops/premises are also evoked—for historical and contemporary anthropological records do not necessarily point to well-attuned induction of the philosophical/theological premises of the dignity of human persons, male and female, that undergird a sound phenomenological theological personal and social ethics.

In cultures such as my own in Australia (and across many decades I have noticed also in urban Papua New Guinea), there is a loss of understanding of lawful boundaries of sexual behaviours and of marriage and family; and in Melanesian societies there remain undercurrents of earlier understandings of person and society that appeared to have a validity and a stability in specific historical cultural settings but that nowadays are less-viewed as having validity or viability in changing Melanesian cultural settings. One approach is deontic: "*Do this!*"/"*Do not do that!*" This seems less persuasive in the face both of past inheritances and of prevalent contemporary social changes and influences. That is why—rather than a moral theology approach—I more espouse a *theological ethics approach*.

In respect of the instances of human relations between the sexes, in marriage, and in sexual identities and roles, I do not pretend that it is necessarily straightforward inductively to demonstrate an inherent lawfulness. While I cannot pretend to have as much depth-exposure to Melanesian cultures as to my own Australian culture, I nevertheless have an advantage from extensive travels over many decades that have provided substantial across-time and cross-cultural Melanesian observations as well as numerous international observations. Quite apart from what my Catholic religion teaches doctrinally, I have observed the dysfunctionality in families that lack stable bonds between husband and wife; I have observed how children who lack wholesome male and female parental/mentor models are disadvantaged in human maturation and fulfilment; I have observed how societies that do not have respectful understandings of masculine human dignity and respectful understandings of feminine human dignity thereby fail to uphold the dignity of human persons—and become chaotic and dysfunctional personally and socially.

Summing-up the Thesis and Method of the Paper

The outlines in this paper of the sweep of philosophical worldviews through to the contemporary international era bring us to situations where classical "natural law" foundations are hardly present in the dominant ideation both in international academia and in international society (societies). The qualifier "international" is

introduced in recognition that there are local societies that do not share prevalent international valuations. Historically, Melanesian societies were local societies that did not share in the historical worldviews/philosophies/theologies as here surveyed until the missionary and trade influences of the modern period.[54] In the contemporary era it is the overlay of distinctively Melanesian worldviews and international worldviews that is a particular challenge in bringing "natural law" perspectives to historical and contemporary Melanesian contexts—especially in an endeavour to adopt inductive methods and apologetics for "theological ethics". Such is the challenge of this paper—a challenge that necessarily is addressed in an exploratory way, rather than in a definitive manner.

From the viewpoint of "human understanding" as named in the promotional poster for the 2019 MATS conference that is the genesis of this paper, the thrust of my argument is that a natural theology approach leads to theological ethics that are of a *reasoned* kind—of a reasoned kind where holistic observation proposes that we assent to a coherence or lawfulness that is *inherent in nature*. Inherent in the nature of the "physical" order (what has often been termed "the laws of nature" understood materially) *and* inherent in the nature of the "metaphysical" order (what has often been referred to as "moral law"). The emphasis in this paper points to an apologetic for appealing to what in holistic observances may been seen as "reasonable", with a reasonableness that is *lawful* in a holistic perspective across the domains of "physical" and "metaphysical".

A theological ethics approach is consistent with such an appeal because the appeal is cognitively and practically attuned to social and cultural behaviours both for persons and for inheritances and for present social contexts of persons; and attuned in ways that cohere with our physical/metaphysical nature. (Although I recognise the complexities of "natures"—plural—I say "nature" to reinforce a "holistic" coherence.) Such ethical manners of living and behaviours are healthy; such behaviours and manners of living are fulfilling;

[54] In any event, it is only with the recent modern period that one may speak of an "*international* worldview or worldviews". The point of emphasis or distinction with Melanesian societies is the degree of local specificity in worldview or worldviews, even while recognising certain pan-Melanesian characteristics of worldviews.

such behaviours and manners of living give glory to the one who gave us the gift of our nature (of our natures) and thus have the character of *worship*. This last word, "worship", takes us to the heart of our nature—our human nature (natures)—since we are made for the beauty of creature/creator relationship that properly should be named as *love* and *worship*. Repeating the second lead-quote of this paper:

> To attain a complete and certain understanding of the requirements of the natural law, sinful humanity needed [divine] revelation (*CCC*, 2071).[55]

[55] For treatment of natural law in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, see nn. 2035–39.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE CONCEPT OF GOD IN RELATION TO HUMAN NATURE: MELANESIANS IN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract
Throughout history, the human person has had a natural desire to know God. Among the created order, human persons alone have a capacity to inquire into God. By using the rational capacity, which is part of human nature, he or she is able to come to a concept of a being responsible for bringing into being all creatures. Understanding the history of philosophical thinking, will enable us to see how the human person is concerned with the concept of God. The human person is rational; and using this power he/she gets the concept of the creator. Using reason alone, the human person is capable of attain knowledge of the existence of God, as the creator of the universe. It is also possible through reason alone to know some of the attributes that pertain to God. Yet, the human person without revelation cannot know the nature and the will of God. Hence, though capable to know the existence of God as the creator of the universe, through reason alone, revelation is important to get into God's will and nature. Natural reason and revelation complement each other in our knowledge of God. This article shows the proofs of some philosophers on the existence of God using reason alone. I will classify them into cosmological, ontological, and unanimity of all cultures' arguments. I will also trace some verses in the Bible that support the human person's natural knowledge of God. Finally, I will show that in Melanesia, as well as in Africa, the existence of God is so obvious that it is not subjected to intellectual speculation, such that doubt about the existence of God has not yet been a subject of discussion in Melanesia and in Africa.

Key Words
concept of God, existence of God, natural theology, revelation, Melanesian culture

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INTRODUCTION

The subject of this paper is the human person's capacity in coming to know God and the extent of that knowledge. In this paper I intend to show that Melanesian people are not left behind in having a natural knowledge of God. This will help demonstrate the universality of the natural human knowledge of God. The human person is capable of coming to the concept of God by his/her nature as a rational being. "... every human soul has, by reason of her nature ... contemplation of true being ..."[1] All cultures have manifested a natural knowledge of God, or at least of a supernatural world. Yet, with all people having the concept of God, this does not mean that God is a human construct. Rather, God exists as the source of this concept in the human person. The history of thought shows human inquiry into the concept of God. Christianity has had two ways of approaching knowledge of God: natural theology and revelation. Natural theology is a way of knowing the existence of God, and the divine attributes by using reason alone. However, this knowledge is limited and imperfect. Revelation comes to perfect it and is the knowledge of what we get through supernatural self-disclosure. This is sometimes called special revelation and is collected in the Bible. The two ways of knowing God are complementary in the Christian tradition. The human person using unaided reason can come to know the existence of God by reflection on the created order. Through reason too the human person can grasp some of the attributes of God, which reason can reflect by itself. However, knowledge of the essence or nature of God needs revelation.

Philosophers and theologians agree that the human being is capable to some extent of knowing God though reason alone. This seems to be universal in most cultures of the world. Reason is taken as the preamble for the reception of faith. However, revelation is essential for adequate knowledge of God. In this paper I would like to survey the history of philosophy on reason alone in coming to the knowledge of God. Then I will explore what the Bible says on the

[1] Plato, *Phdr.* 249e: … πᾶσα μὲν ἀνθρώπου ψυχὴ φύσει τεθέαται τὰ ὄντα ...English translation of all Plato's works used here is in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues, Including the Letters* (ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns; Bollingen Series, 71; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).

roles of reason in coming to the knowledge of God. Philosophers, using their power of reason, could make arguments to demonstrate the existence of God and the divine attributes. The arguments vary from cosmological to ontological. By cosmological arguments I mean those that start from creatures and infer inductively that God is responsible for the existence of those creatures. In other words, the created world gives us a clue to the existence of a creator. By ontological argument I mean those that start from the concept of God itself and infer deductively that a being that corresponds to this concept must necessarily exist. There is also the argument from the unanimity of all cultures, which suggests that, since all cultures of the world, whether isolated or connected, have a concept of God, a being that corresponds to this concept must exist. The Bible too attests that those who have no revelation still have a concept of aa spiritual realm, where God is believed to be.

This paper has five sections. The first deals with human nature in relation to God. This section aims to affirm the human person's capacity to inquire about God, or the realm of God, the characteristics of this inquiry, and its universality in most cultures of the world, including Melanesia. Section two examines the philosophical approach to the concept of God. It is simply a documentation of what philosophers have said about God using reason alone. Section three deals with what the Bible says about human nature and its capacity to reach knowledge of the concept of God. Section four is the evaluation of that human capacity to attain such knowledge. Finally, section five considers the concept of God in Melanesia before offering a conclusion.

THE HUMAN PERSON'S NATURE IN RELATION TO GOD

In this section, I would like to explain what is meant by human nature and knowledge of God. Also, what is included in this unaided reason in coming to the concept of God? Natural knowledge of God is God known by human beings, through reason alone. Maurice R. Holloway says this knowledge is:

> God in so far as he is knowable through the light of natural reason alone, apart from any revelation God may have made concerning himself. That is to say it will be God as knowable through the being

> of creatures; in a word, God as the first principle and proper cause of being, as the pure act of subsistent existence.[2]

Holloway continues to give the characteristics of this knowledge. First, he says that it "is a science, since it concludes to a certain and necessary truths" concerning God. This is because God is seen as a being responsible for the existence of the created order. Second, it is "wisdom, and the highest of the natural wisdoms, since it orders all things and all knowledge through the first and highest cause, God."[3] When human person looks at creatures God comes in as the final cause of all. The third characteristic according to Holloway is "not ordered to the performance of any action or production of anything, but only the contemplation of truth"[4] about God. This means that it is knowledge for its own sake. Fourthly, this endeavour is "the most perfect and highest of man's powers." This is because, the "intellect, is functioning in reference" to the supreme intelligence, that is God. The fifth characteristic, Holloway concludes:

> … is the most satisfying and enjoyable of all natural sciences, for while what this science can tell us about the existence and nature of God may be small in quantity, the little knowledge that it does tell us affords the intellect greater joy and satisfaction and contributes more to its perfection that all the knowledge we can find out about creatures through the other sciences.[5]

We can say that the desire to know God is an activity that is within the nature of the human person. This activity makes the human person stand up with a special dignity that other animals cannot claim to have. The human person's natural knowledge about God is therefore within his/her nature. It brings fulfilment and perfection to the human person. This kind of knowledge is available in most cultures, including the Melanesian culture, even though the extent and quality may differ from one culture to another.

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[2] Maurice R. Holloway, SJ, *An Introduction to Natural Theology* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1959), 16.
[3] Holloway, *An Introduction to Natural Theology*, 23.
[4] Holloway, *An Introduction to Natural Theology*, 23.
[5] Holloway, *An Introduction to Natural Theology*, 23–24.

PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACHES TO THE CONCEPT OF GOD

Ancient Period of Philosophy

There were several philosophers during the ancient period of philosophy, but I shall only mention a few. In this section I would like to refer to Homer, Plato, and Aristotle on rational knowledge of God. Even the writings of Plato and Aristotle are numerous. The few quotations presented here are an invitation for the reader to go to the original sources and discover more.

In Homeric times, no one questioned the existence of gods. The majority of people had an idea of anthropomorphic deities and demigods. *Odyssey* affirms that human being cannot live without God. Human actions, such as prayer and sacrifice of food and drink, manifesting belief in and a relationship with God existed long before there was special revelation. Homer wrote: "... when you have duly prayed and made your drink-offering, pass the cup to your friend that he may do so also. I doubt not that he too lifts his hands in prayer, for man cannot live without God in the world."[6] This quotation shows a sense of people having a concept of the divine.

Plato affirms, in his writings, that "…everyone with the least sense always calls on god at the beginning of any undertaking, small or great."[7] God is described as spirit or soul and the source of change in the universe. In *Phaedrus*, Plato says: "the mind itself has a divining power."[8] This says it all. The power of the mind with capacity to come to the spiritual realm, where God is said to take abode, is able to prophesy to the existence of God. For Plato, the immortality of the human soul is derived from the immortal nature, and in this case; none other than God.

The soul of human person is the source of motion in a body. This soul is from a first principle which for Plato, it is characterised by

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[6] Homer, *Od.* 3.44–48: τοῦ γὰρ καὶ δαίτης ἠντήσατε δεῦρο μολόντες. ‖αὐτὰρ ἐπὴν σπείσῃς τε καὶ εὔξεαι ἢ θέμις ἐστί ‖δὸς καὶ τούτῳ ἔπειτα δέπας μελιηδέος οἴνου ‖ σπεῖσαι, ἐπεὶ καὶ τοῦτον ὀίομαι ἀθανάτοισιν ‖εὔχεσθαι¨πάντες δὲ θεῶν χατέουσ' ἄνθρωποι. English trans. Samuel Butler, *The Iliad of Homer and the Odyssey* (London: William Benton, Publisher, 1952).

[7] Plato, *Ti.* 27c: τοῦτπο γε δὴ πάντες ὅσιν καὶ κατὰ βραχὺ σωθροσύνης μετέχουσιν, ἐπὶ παντὸς ὁρμῇ καὶ σμικροῦ καὶ μεγάλου πράγματος θεὸν ἀεί που καλοῦσιν:...

[8] Plato, *Phdr.*, 242c: μαντικόν γέ τι καὶ ἡ ψυχή·

eternal motion, no beginning or end, imperishable, and immutable as he says:

> ...moreover this self-mover is the source and first principle of motion for all other things that are moved. Now a first principle cannot come into being, for while anything that comes to be must come to be from a first principle, the latter cannot come to be from anything whatsoever; if it did, it would cease any longer to be a first principle....[9]

This being is not only the source of movement in a living body, but for Plato, it is the principle of motion ın the whole universe. Plato continues:

> The self-mover, then, is the first principle of motion, and it is as impossible that it should be destroyed...otherwise, the whole universe, the whole of that which comes to be, would collapse into immobility, and never find another source of motion to bring it back into being.[10]

In *Timaeus*, Plato gave something like a creation story in myth form. Here is where he talks about the demiurge. The demiurge is taken as a workman, who seems to form the universe according to the ideal or patterns of a subordinate being rather than the supreme being. He says: "Now everything that becomes or is created must of necessity be created by some cause, for without a cause, nothing can be created...the world has been framed in the likeness of that which is apprehended by reason and mind and unchangeable..."[11] The god portrayed in *Timaeus* is not of God as the ultimate cause of all that exists. Rather, the demiurge works on the pre-existing material.

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[9] Plato, *Phdr.* 245d: ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ὅσα κινεῖται τοῦτο πηγὴ καὶ ἀρχὴ κινήσεως ἀρχὴ δὲ ἀγένητον. ἐξ ἀρχῆς γὰρ ἀνάγκη πᾶν τὸ γιγνόμενον γίγνεσθαι, αὐτὴν δὲ μηδ' ἐξ ἑνός· εἰ γὰρ ἔκ του ἀρχὴ γίγνοιτο, οὐκ ἂν ἐξ ἀρχῆς γίγνοιτο.

[10] Plato, *Phdr.* 245d–e: οὕτω δὴ κινήσεως μὲν ἀρχὴ τὸ αὐτὸ αὑτὸ κινοῦν. τοῦτο δὲ οὔτ' ἀπόλλυσθαι οὔτε γίγνεσθαι δυνατόν, ἢ πάντα τε οὐρανὸν πᾶσάν τε γένεσιν συμπεσοῦσαν στῆναι καὶ μήποτε αὖθις ἔχειν ὅθεν κινηθέντα γενήσεται.

[11] Plato, *Ti.* 28a–29a: πᾶν δὲ αὖτὸ υιυνόμενον ὑπ' αἰτίου τινὸς ἐξ ἀνάγκης γίγνεσθαι΄παντὶ γὰρ ἀδύματον χωρὶς αἰτίου γένεσιν σχεῖν. ὅτου μὲν οὖν ἂν ὁ δημιουργὸς πρὸς τὸ κατὰ ταύτὰ ἔχον βλέπων ἀεί, τοιούτῳ τινὶ προσχρώμενος παραδείγματι, τὴν ὶδέαν καὶ δύναμιν αὐτοῦ ἀπεργάζηται, καλὸν ἐξ ἀνάγκης....οὕτω δὴ γεγενημένος πρὸς τὸ λόγῳ καὶ φρονήσει περιληπτὸν καὶ κατὰ ταὐτὰ ἔχον δεδημιούργηται:

Plato also introduced an important attribute of the demiurge, which he referred to as goodness. As he says:

> ...the creator...was good, and the good can never have any jealousy of anything. And being free from jealousy, he desires that all things should be as like himself as they could be...God desired that all things should be good and nothing bad, so far as this was attainable.[12]

In the Aristotelian writings, the concept of God as a self-unmoved mover is elaborated. In his *Metaphysics* there is the argument for one non-material being as the cause of change and movement in the universe. Again, this being of Aristotle is not the creator of the universe because matter seems to have always existed. Also according to Aristotle, this being is not aware of the universe because it would diminish one's dignity to know lesser things than the divine self. The main activity of this being is the contemplation of thought itself. The unmoved mover according to Aristotle causes motion by desire. He says:

> Now it is in just this way that the object of desire and the object of thought produce movement—they move without being moved. And indeed the primary objects of both are the same...Now the source of movement for the thought is the object of thought, and, of the two systoecheiae, one is intrinsically the object of thought. On this side, the, substance is primary and, within substance, that which is simple and is in activation.[13]

According to Aristotle, heaven and earth depend on the unmoved mover. The relation of both heaven and nature to the unmoved mover is in the order of final causality. The doctrine of the unmoved mover is regarded as the basis core of popular religious traditions.

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[12] Plato, *Ti.* 29e–30a: ἀγαθὸς ἦν, ἀγαθῷ δὲ οὐδεὶς περὶ οὐδενὸς οὐδέποτε ἐγγίγνεται φθόνος; τούτου δ' ἐκτὸς ὢν πάντα ὅτι μάλιστα ἐβουλήθη γενέσθαι παραπλήσια ἑαυτῷ...βουληθεὶς γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ἀγαθὰ μὲν πάντα, φλαῦρον δὲ μηδὲν εἶναι κατὰ δύναμιν...

[13] Aristotle, *Metaph.* Lambda 7, 1072a: κινεῖ δὲ ὧδε τὸ ὀρεκτὸν καὶ τὸ νομτόν: κινεῖ οὐ κινούμενα. τούτων τὰ πρῶτα τὰ αὐτά...νοῦς δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ νομτοῦ κινεῖται, νομτὴ δὲ ἡ ἑτέρα συστοιχία καθ' αὑτήν: καὶ ταύτης ἡ οὐσία πρώτη, καὶ ταύτης ἡ ἁπλῆ καὶ κατ' ἐνέργειαν... English trans. H. Lawson-Tancred, *Aristotle: Metaphysics*, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 1998).

In this section we see Homer, Plato, and Aristotle affirming natural knowledge of God or divinity in their own time, prior to most of the special revelation of God recorded in the Bible. In the next subsection, we are going to examine the contribution of European medieval philosophy. Although Christians held that special revelation had been completed in Jesus, philosophers in this period of history could still use natural reason alone to prove the existence of God.

Medieval Period of Philosophy

In the medieval period of western history of philosophy, the concept of a monotheistic God was well developed. The major concern at the time was to prove the existence of God. During this epoch, there were several philosophers who addressed this problem. In this regard, I would like to make reference to Augustine, Anselm, and Thomas Aquinas.

Augustine's reasoning about the existence of God is from eternal truths. He wrote:

> A man who is not great-spirited or magnanimous still has a true spirit. In both cases the reason is that the essence or being of body and of spirit is not the being or essence of truth; but the trinity is, which is one, only, great God, true, truthful, truth.[14]

The first step in the argument from eternal truth as Augustine writes is "my certitude of my own existence."[15] The starting point is the living personal soul. Augustine says since he is deceived, he must be there.[16] Then Augustine continued to explain the degree of beings. "Some things simply exist; others exist and live; yet others exist, live and understand."[17] A human person exists, lives, and

[14] Augustine, *De trin.* 8.2.3(CCL 50.270): "Animum enim uerum habet etiam qui non est magnanimous; quandoquidem corporis et animi essential, non est ipsius ueritatis essential, sicuti est Trinitas Deus unus, solus, magnus, uerus, uerax, ueritas." English trans. E. Hill, *Saint Augustine: The Trinity*, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, part 1, vol. 5: The Trinity (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991).
[15] Ralph M. McInerny, *A History of Western Philosophy*, vol. 2: *From St. Augustine to Ockham* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970), 3.
[16] Augustine, *De ciu. Dei* 11.26 (CCL 48.345).
[17] McInerny, *A History of Western Philosophy*, 2.35.

understands. Truth is higher than reason; consequently, truth is higher and more excellent than our minds. It is truth which makes us understand all good. The beauty of truth is above space and time. "All who behold it are changed for the better, and no one passes judgment on it, and without it no one can judge aright. Hence it is clear, beyond doubt, that truth is superior to our minds…"[18] Augustine concludes that truth itself is God, who exists truly and perfectly. He went on to say:

> But it is the one true God who is active and operative in all those things, but always acting as God, that is present everywhere in his totality, free from spatial confinement, completely untrammelled, absolutely indivisible, utterly unchangeable, and filling heaven and earth with his ubiquitous power which is independent of anything in the natural order.[19]

In light of the notion of eternal truth, Augustine saw God as the source of all good things and happiness. "God is the only source to be found of any good things, but especially of those which make man good and those which will make him happy; only from him do they come into a man and attach themselves to a man."[20]

Anselm introduced the ontological argument for the existence of God. Being a man of faith, he sought reconciliation between reason and faith. In one of his famous works, *Proslogion*, he attempted to develop an ontological proof for the existence of God. He understood the idea of God as that than which nothing greater can

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[18] Augustine, *De lib. arb.* 2.14.38 (CCL 29.): "…cernentes se commutat omnes in Melius, a nullo in deterius commutator; nullus de illa iudicat, nullus sine illa iudicat bene. Ac per hoc eam manifestum est mentibus nostris…" English trans. Robert P. Russell, OSA, *St. Augustine: The Teacher; The Free Choice of the Will; Grace and Free Will* (Fathers of the Church, vol. 59; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1968).

[19] Augustine, *De ciu. Dei* 7.30 (CCL 47.212): "Haec utem facit atque agit unus uerus Deus, sed sicut Deus, id est ubique totus, nullis inclusus locis, nullis unculis alligatus, in nullas partes sectilis, ex nulla parte mutabilis, implens caelum et terram praesente potential, non indigente natura." English trans. John O'Meara, *St Augustine: Concerning the City of God against the Pagans* (Penguin Classics; London: Penguin, 1984).

[20] Augustine, *De trin.* 13.7.10 (CCL 50A.394): "Non enim quaecumque bona, maximeque illa quibus quisque fit bonus, et illa quibus fiet beatus, unde nisi a Deo in hominem ueniant, et homini accedant, inueniri potest."

be conceived. Anselm argued that among all of us even the fool has the idea of something than which no greater can be conceived. He says:

> Now we believe that You are something than which nothing greater can be thought. Or can it be that a thing of such a nature does not exist, since 'the Fool has said in his heart, there is no God' [Ps. 13:1; 52:1]? But surely, when this same Fool hears what I am speaking about, namely, 'something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought', he understands what he hears, and what he understands is in his mind, even if he does not understand that it actually exists.[21]

He went on to give an example of a painter who has a plan of something he wants to come up with. The plan is in the mind of the painter but the portrait is not actually existing since it is yet to be realised. "However, when he has actually painted it, then he both has it in his mind and understands that it exists because he has now made it."[22] From the above analogy, Anselm asserted that the being of God cannot exist in the mind alone; otherwise it would not be greater. Anselm concludes:

> And surely, that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought cannot exist in the mind alone. For if it exists solely in the mind even, it can be thought to exist in reality also, which is greater ... Therefore there is absolutely no doubt that something-than-which-a greater-cannot-be-thought exists both in the mind and in reality.[23]

Thomas Aquinas gives the famous five ways for the existence of God, known as the cosmological argument. According to him, the

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[21] Anselm, *Proslogion* 2.2: "Et quidem credimus te esse aliquid quo nihil maius coitari possit. An ergo non est aliqua talis natura, quia 'dixit insipiens in corde suo: non est Deus" [Ps 13:1; 52:1]? Sed certe ipse idem insipiens, cum audit hoc ipsum qud dico: 'aliquid quo maius nihil cogitari potest', intelligit quod audit; et quod intelligit, in intellectu eius est, etiam si non intelligat illud esse." English trans. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (eds), *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* (Oxford World Classics; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[22] Anselm, *Proslogion* 2.2: "Cum vero iam pinxit, et habet in intellectu et intelligit esse quod iam fecit."

[23] Anselm, *Proslogion* 2.2: "Et certe id quo maius cogitari nequit, non potest esse in solo intllectu. Si enim vel in solo intellectu est, potest cogitari esse et in re; quod maius est ... Existit ergo procul dubio aliquid quo maius cogitari non valet, et in intellectu et in re."

existence of God can be proved in five ways using the created order or creatures:

The first is the argument from motion or change. This is a development and elaboration of Aristotle's argument about the 'unmoved mover'. Whatever is in motion is set in motion by another. If that which sets in motion is itself in motion then it must be set in motion by another and that in its turn by another again. But we cannot proceed to infinity; otherwise there would be no first mover. Therefore, we are bound to arrive at the first mover, which is set in motion by no other. For Thomas Aquinas this is what everyone understands to be God.[24]

The second argument is from the nature of causes. By looking at what causes another, we would go to infinity, which is impossible. Aquinas concludes that there must be a primary cause, which causes all the rest, but itself uncaused. The first cause generally must therefore be inferred. This should be the cause of things and phenomena in general. The uncaused cause, for Thomas is none other than God.[25]

The third Argument is taken from possibility and necessity. It is about contingency. Thomas says:

> Some of the things we come across can be but need not be, for we find them springing up and dying away, thus sometimes in being and sometimes not. Now everything cannot be like this, for a thing that need not be, once was not; and if everything need not be, once upon a time there was nothing. But if that were true there would be nothing even now, because something that does not exist can only be brought into being by something already existing.[26]

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[24] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.2.3.

[25] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.2.3.

[26] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.2.3: "Invenimus enim in rebus quaedam quae sunt possibilia esse et non esse; cum quaedam inveniantur generari et corrumpi, et pr consequens possibilia esse et non esse. Impossibile est autem omnia quae sunt talia, semper esse; quia quod possible est non esse, quandoque non est. Si igitur omnia sunt possibilia non esse, aliquando nihil fuit in rebus. Sed si hoc est verum, etiam nunc nihil esset; quia quod non est, non incipit esse nisi per aliquid quod est." English trans. Thomas Gilby, OP, *Thomas Aquinas: Summa Theologiae, vol. 1: The Existence of God, Part One: Questions 1–13* (New York: Doubleday, 1969).

The fourth argument is taken from the gradation found in things. In other words, it is about the degrees of perfection of beings. Aquinas says:

> Some things are found to be more good, more true, more noble, and so on, and other things less. But some comparative terms describe varying degrees of approximation to a superlative … There is something therefore which causes in all other things their being, their goodness, and whatever other perfectin they have. And this we call 'God'.[27]

The fifth way is taken from the governance of the universe. In other words, it is called the teleological argument or design. Aquinas says:

> An orderedness of actions to an end is observed in all bodies obeying natural laws, even when they lack awareness … Nothing however that lacks awareness tends to a goal, except under the direction of someone with awareness and with understanding; the arrow, for example, requires an archer. Everything in nature, therefore, is directed to its goal by someone with intelligence, and this we call 'God'.[28]

All five ways are taken from the effects of something from which we may infer to be God. God comes in as responsible for the effects we see around. The arguments from Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas are said to be cosmological arguments for the existence of God. This is because they are all derived from the cosmic order. Since the cosmic order is the effect, the human mind can infer the cause for these effects. For Thomas Aquinas, this cause is none other than what we call God. The

[27] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.2.3: "Invenitur enim in rebus aliquid magis et minus bonum, et verum, et nobile; et sic de aliis huiusmodi. Sed magis et minus dicuntur de diversis, secundum quod appropinquant diversimode ad aliquid quod maxime est … Ergo est aliquid intelligens a quo omnes res naturales ordinantur ad finem; et hoc dicimus *Deum*."

[28] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.2.3: "Videmus enim quod aliqua auae cognition carent, scilicet corpora naturalia, opeerantur propter finem … Ea autem quoae non habent cognitionem, non tendunt in finem, nisi directa ab aliquo cognoscente et intelligente, sicut sagitta a sagittante. Ergo est aliquid intelligens, a quo omnes res naturales odinanture ad finem; et hoc dicimus *Deum*."

medieval period in Europe is characterisd by a strong belief in God. All the philosophers cited here shared in that strong belief; they were not questioning or criticising the existence of God but rather seeking to prove God's existence.

Modern Period of Philosophy

The modern period of western philosophy is marked by its emphasis on reason, empiricism, and positivism and was more critical, even sceptical, with regards to the existence of God. However, in this article I shall refer to René Descartes' works on the concept of God. Descartes shows the existence of God by using reason alone. He became aware of a thought or idea of a being more perfect than himself. This idea was put into his mind by a nature that was more perfect than his. According to Descartes, it is God who put this idea in his mind:

> ... reflecting on the fact that I had doubts, and that consequently my being was not completely perfect ... I decided to inquire whence I had learned to think of something more perfect than myself; and I clearly recognized that this must have been from some nature which was in fact more perfect ...[29]

Hence, for Descartes, since he is mortal, finite, and imperfect and the idea of God in his mind is immortal, infinite, and perfect, he himself cannot be the author of this idea. God must exist as the transmitter of this idea. And for this way of thinking, he concludes God must exist. Descartes' and Anselm's arguments can be termed as ontological since they start from the very idea of God and go on to show God must exist in reality.

This first section of this article outlined the ideas philosophers have used at various points in history to argue for the existence of God using reason alone. He following section looks at what the Bible records about the human ability to come to some knowledge of God based on reason alone.

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[29] René Descartes, *Discourse on Method* 4. English trans. F. E. Sutcliffe, *Descartes: Discourse on Method and the Meditations*, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).

The Bible and Human Nature in Coming to Knowledge of God

In this section I would like to trace some of the verses in the Bible that speak about the role of reason in the knowledge of God. This is on how the human person, using his or her rational nature, can come to the concept of God.

The psalmist says: "The heavens tell of the glory of God and the firmament proclaims the work of his hands" (Ps 18[19]:1[2]). Thus, nature can lead to the recognition of the existence of a transcendent God, creator of the universe. This is through the natural power of perception and intellect. Also, Psalm 8:4 speaks about seeing the greatness of the creator through creatures. The psalmist says "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars you have established ..." The psalmist here sees obviously that creatures are the work of a creator, God.

The book of Wisdom seems to emphasise the precedence of human intellect when it comes to knowledge of God, by referring to its failure to be used. It says:

> For all people who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature; and they were unable from the good things that are seen to know the one who exists, nor did they recognize the artisan, while paying heed to his works ... And if people were amazed at their power and working, let them perceive from them how much more powerful is the one who formed them. From the greatness and beauty of created things, comes the corresponding perception of their creator. (Wis 13:1, 4–5).

Paul brings in moral aspect besides the testimony of revelation. God imprinted certain knowledge of moral law upon the hearts of all human beings. Fidelity to this can lead to the salvation of those who have never heard the revealed word of God. This is a fidelity that involves not just the intellect but a human person's whole personality. Paul says:

> When Gentiles who do not possess the law, do distinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. They show that what the law requires is written in their hearts, to which their own conscience, also bears witnesses; and

> their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them ... (Rom 2:12–16)

The few verses I have traced from the Bible attest to the belief that creation speaks to the intellect of the human person. The intellect, through its reasoning power, is capable of inferring a being behind the existence of creatures. Hence, the Bible too acknowledges the knowledge of God arrived at through using reason alone.

Evaluation of the Nature of the Human Person in Achieving Knowledge of God

I have maintained that the human person is rational. This rationality allows him/her to come to the concept of the highest being. This being, in English called God, has been defined as supreme, absolute, "omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good."[30]

I have also maintained that all cultures of the world, whether isolated on the periphery or connected with the rest, have a concept of a supernatural being. In this case, by his/her nature the human person is capable of having the concept of God. Since this knowledge is intellectual as it is from reason alone, the question arises: to what extent can this knowledge reach? Can human beings rely on intellectual knowledge to attain salvation? Or does the rational or intellectual knowledge of God have authority over revelation?

Alvin Platinga on this issue says: "Part of our explanation of our so thinking ... lies in our views ..."[31] This is in line with the position of Thomas Aquinas, that unaided reason can arrive at limited knowledge of God, for revelation is necessary for a human person to have adequate knowledge of God. Thomas Aquinas says:

> For the human intellect is not able to reach a comprehension of the divine substance through its natural power. For according to its manner of knowing in the present life, the intellect depends on the sense for the origin of knowledge; and so those things that do not

[30] Stephen M. Cahn and David Shatz (eds), *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 3.
[31] Alvin Platinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (eds), *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1983), 36.

> fall under the senses cannot be grasped under the human intellect except in so far as that knowledge of them is gathered from the sensible things.[32]

Thomas Aquinas continues to say that if the truth about God would be left on human reason alone, three consequences would follow. The first is that "few [people] would possess the knowledge of God"[33] According to him, there are three reasons as to why everybody cannot come to the knowledge of God through reason alone namely: "Some do not have physical disposition for such work ... however much they tried, they would be unable to reach the highest level of human knowledge which consists of knowing God."[34] I agree with Thomas Aquinas since our IQs are not the same for everybody. Some are gifted more and others less. Others are too busy with daily activities. "For some [people] must devote themselves to taking care of temporal matters ... [and] would not be able to give so much time to the leisure of contemplative inquiry as to reach ... the knowledge of God."[35] And finally he says, "there are some who are cut off by indolence."[36] This is true since the search for knowledge is hindered by laziness and lack of curiosity.

The second awkward consequence of leaving knowledge of God to reason alone is that people could only "reach it after a great deal of time." The reason is that this knowledge needs "a long training."

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[32] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, 1.3.3: "Nam ad substantiam ipsius capiendam intellectus humanus naturali virtute pertingere non potest: cum intellectus nostril, secundum modum praesentis vitae, cognitio a sensu incipiat; et ideo e aquae in sensu non cadunt, non possunt humano intellectu capi, isi quatenus ex sensibilibus earum cogntio colligitur." English translation by Anton C. Pegis (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975).

[33] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 1.4.3: "… paucis hominibus Dei cognitio inesset."

[34] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 1.4.3: "Quidam siquidem propter complexionis indispositionem … unde nullo studio ad hoc pertingere possent ut summum gradum humanae cognitionis attingerent, qui in cognoscendo Deum consistit."

[35] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 1.4.3: "Oportet enim esse inter homines aliquos qui temporalibus administrandis insistent … tantum tempus in otio contemplativae inquisitionis non possent expendere ut … pertingerent, scilicet Dei cognitionem."

[36] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 1.4.3: "Quidem autem impediuntur pigritia."

He says, "… in youth, when the soul is swayed by various movements of the passions, it is not in a suitable state for the knowledge of such lofty truth."[37]

The third consequence is that since human reason is fallible, it can make errors. He says, "... this is due partly to the weakness of our intellect in judgement, and partly to the admixture of images."[38] From this he concludes that revelation is necessary to help human person to come to the adequate knowledge of God.

Pope Pius XII agreed that reason can come to the concept of God and affirm the divine existence. But to understand the nature of this being needs another source of knowledge, which is revelation. He wrote:

> Though human reason is, strictly speaking, truly capable by its own natural power and light of attaining to a true and certain knowledge of the one personal God, who watches over and controls the world by his providence, and of the natural law written in our hearts by the Creator, yet there are many obstacles which prevent reason from the effective and the relation between God and man ...[39]

The human mind is limited in using reason alone to come to the knowledge of God for various reasons.

> The human mind, in its turn, is hampered in the attaining of such truths, not only by the impacts of the senses and the imagination, but also by the disordered appetites which are the consequences of the original sin. So it happens that men in such matters easily persuade themselves that what they would not like to be true is false or at least doubtful.[40]

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[37] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 1.4.4: "… vix post longum tempus pertingerent … longum exercitium … tempore iuventutis, dum diversis motibus passionum anima fluctuat, non est apta ad tam altae veritatis cognitionem …"

[38] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 1.4.5: "… propter debilitatem intellecuts nostril in iudicando, et phantasmatum permixtionem.".

[39] Pius XII, *Humani generis* (12 August 1950) 2 (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 42 [1950], 561–578, at 561–562). Quoted by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 37. English translation in *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Homebush, NSW: St Pauls, 1994).

[40] Pius XII, *Humani generis* 2.

Hence, if the search for the knowledge of God is left to reason alone, this knowledge would also be too human-centred. God had to intervene to complement the human reason.

The natural reasoning on the existence of God prepares the ground for understanding revelation. Some cultures, maybe because of the level of academic development, do not inquire into the realm of the spiritual purely for intellectual purposes. As we are going to see below, in the case of Melanesians, the spiritual realm is so obvious that people relate to it without much questioning. Yet, I would like to emphasise that the knowledge of this realm first comes from natural reason before any revelation. Melanesian people are part of the cultures of the world with a natural knowledge of God, or at last the spiritual realm, where God is believed to abide.

THE CONCEPT OF GOD AND MELANESIANS

Melanesian people appeal to a spiritual world where God is believed to be. Even before the arrival of the Christian missionaries to this part of the world, people had relationships with the spiritual realm. Bernard Narokobi said, "As Melanesians, we are a spiritual people. Even before Christians came onto our shores, we felt and knew the forces of a source greater than ourselves."[41] Narokobi went on to show the Melanesian understanding of this reality. "From our spirituality, we have communal vision of the cosmos. Our vision was not and still is not an artificially dichotomised and compartmentalized pragmatism of the secular society. Ours is a vision of totality, a vision of cosmic harmony."[42] Narokobi shows his concern about judging the Melanesian as godless using foreign criteria. He says: "Missionaries come to Melanesia and find an absence of church buildings, mitres and rich-priestly attire, ordained priests, hierarchy of bishops and angelic host of brothers, sisters, deacons, catechists and laiety [sic!]. They conclude Melanesians lived under an atmosphere of godlessness ..."[43] For him, this is not the case, Melanesians are religious people, and they have a concept of the spiritual realm and sense of God.

[41] Bernard Narokobi, *The Melanesian Way: Total Cosmic Vision of Life* (Port Moresby: Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, 1980), 4.
[42] Narokobi, *The Melanesian Way*, 15.
[43] Narokobi, *The Melanesian Way*, 18.

As I wrote this article, I could see some similarities between the Melanesia and African concepts of God. In Melanesia as well as in Africa, there is an appeal to the spiritual world where God is believed to be for religious purposes. The existence of the supernatural realm, and thus the existence of God, and even life after death have not been subjected to doubt in either Melanesia or Africa. The existence of God is taken as so obvious that no one engages in giving arguments to prove the divine existence.

Like Narokobi, Ennio Mantovani described Melanesians as "religious people."[44] John Mbiti described the Africans as "notoriously religious."[45] These statements of Mantovani, Narokobi, and Mbiti affirm that Melanesians and Africans do not separate themselves from the supernatural world. They have a concept of God and a sense of religion. Traditional ways of relating to God are not questioned. Writing about Africa, Mbiti continues, "They saw limits of man's powers and knowledge, and the shortness of human life ... But it seems impossible that the universe could simply have come to existence on its own. God is therefore, the explanation for the origin of the universe, which consists of both visible and invisible realities."[46] The existence of God is obvious from the existence of the world as Metuh says about African people:

> The mystery of the existence of the world, the coming into existence of man, the seasons ... the fundamental human institutions (lineages, marriage, market days and so forth), even the mystery of the unfortunate presence of death and evil in the world are so overwhelming that it becomes necessary to postulate the existence of God to explain them.[47]

The African conception of God is related to the environmental setup. Natural features were seen by African people as ushering the abode of God. For example, for the Chagga people around Mount Kilimanjaro, the name given to God is *Ruwa*. The holy place where

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[44] Ennio Mantovani, "Traditional Religion and Christianity," in *An Introduction to Melanesian Religions: A Handbook for Church Workers* (ed. Ennio Mantovani; Point No. 6; Goroka: The Melanesian Institute, 1984), 1.

[45] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 1.

[46] Mbiti, *An Introduction to African Religion* (Nairobi: Hinemann, 1975), 31–32.

[47] Emefie Ikenga Metuh, *God and Man in African Religion*: *A Case Study of Igbo of Nigeria* (London: Geoffrey Chapman. 1981), 16.

this God is believed to take up abode is Mount Kilimanjaro. The same applies to the Kikuyu people of Kenya. The name given to God by these people is *Ngai*. *Ngai* is believed to stay on Mount Kenya. Sometimes we may say these people worship or take a mountain to be God. However, this is not the case. These geographical features are like a sanctuary where God is given a place; yet God is not located. "Families or individuals turn to God in acts of worship anywhere, without being bound to the feeling that God should be worshipped at a particular place. He is omnipresent, and for that reason they worship him at any place, at any time, where and when the need arises."[48] In Africa as Mbiti testifies, "man lives in a religious universe, so that natural phenomena and objects are intimately associated with God."[49]

In this line of thought Bernard Narokobi writing about Melanesia sees religious experience as an encounter with the divine and it is holistic. He says "... Melanesians do not differentiate religious and non-religious experience. For them ... is a total encounter of the living person with the living person with the universe that is alive and explosive ... is the person's encounter with the spirit, the law, the economics, the politics and the life's own total whole."[50]

In this approach Narokobi agrees that it might be different from the rest of the world like Europe, Asia, and Africa. But he acknowledges and says, "Africans, Asians or others may have the same outlook ... Others may find similarities or parallels with the Melanesian experience."[51] Narokobi adds:

> Melanesian certainly do not hold a secular belief that man exists of his own power and for his own ends ... he is born into a spiritual and religious order ... the Melanesian is born to the knowledge that he lives and works within a spirit world. His actions and his omissions are always being watched by the spirit world.[52]

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[48] John S. Mbiti, *Concept of God in Africa* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 243.
[49] Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 48.
[50] Bernard Narokobi, "What is Religious Experience for a Melanesian?" in *Living Theology in Melanesia: A Reader* (ed. John D'Arcy May; Point, 8; Goroka: Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Social Economic Service, 1985), 69–77, at 70.
[51] Narokobi, "What is Religious Experience for a Melanesian?" 70.
[52] Narokobi, "What is Religious Experience for a Melanesian?" 71.

Anthropological studies show that Melanesian have their own concept of God. The concepts of God in Melanesia are culturally and environmentally rooted. People from different geographical locations have varied understandings of God. Thus, many of the coastal inhabitants, the highlanders, and islanders all have concepts of God according to their environment. The belief in the existence of underwater-world gods is typical of coastal and island dwellers. As culture differs from one place to another, several concepts of God have been found in Melanesia due to many different forms and expressions of religion. They include dema-deities, culture heroes (creator heroes), sky gods, Masalai, and Tambarans.[53] "The sky people from the myth of Hagen regarded the sun as a god, the god of healer. The underworld people believed that the earthquake was the powerful god, and they described him as the angriest of all gods."[54] Norman Habel says:

> Some deities of Melanesia are concerned primarily with the task of ruling and determining the life of society, albeit, often from a distant vantage point in the sky ... or a mountain. The name of this deity is often not revealed to the people. *Nanaranga awine of the Manam* ... for example is not the name of the deity but an expression meaning '*bikman god*.' The spirit living in the cave of the Huli ... is designated 'The one we worship' by the elders of the clan. Among the Mekeo ... A'asia, who established the social rather than the physical order continues to preside over the world of the spirits and direct human life through the social structure he has ordained.[55]

Another dimension of the conception of God around Melanesia is God as a provider of material possessions. This is manifested in the so-called 'cargo cult'. Religious denominations that are blessed with material goods show that God exists in that religion. Probably this came about as a result of the missionary goods and services that

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[53] Neville Bartle. *Death, Witchcraft, and the Spirit World in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea: Developing a Contextual Theology in Melanesia* (Point, 29; Goroka: Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Social Economic Service, 2005), 22.

[54] Ulli Beier and Prithvindra Chakravandra, *Sun and Moon* (Port Moresby: Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, 1974), 6.

[55] Norman C. Habel, "Introduction," in *Powers Plumes and Piglets: Phenomenology of Melanesian Religion* (ed. Norman C. Habel; Bedford Park, SA: Australian Association for the Study of Religions, 1979), 1–18, at 3.

came along with the Christian religion. Missionaries and foreigners in general came with the new faith and with that faith came goods and services which were superior to the traditional ones. Thus, the association of God with modern goods and services gave birth to the cargo cult. Garry Tromf says, "By cargo cult, I mean collective hopes and preparatory actions springing from the expectation of western-style goods, these items to be brought by God, gods or ancestors in considerable qualities."[56] In this context God is seen as the provider of cargo and all other human needs. Garry continues:

> the desire to be wealthy as well as provisioned as expatriates (or other more fortunate Melanesians); the need of the 'have nots' to assuage a jealousy against those who 'have'; the urge to requite those who lord it over villagers with the apparently superior power and technology; the longing for the total salvation and the 'good life' to replace hardship and death; the impetus to adjust traditional fashions to embrace embrace modernity etc.[57]

In accounting for the Melanesian concept of God, Narokobi pointed out some difficulties: "A fundamental problem for a Melanesian to describe the Melanesian religious experience is that he has to us non-Melanesian language and techniques to characterize and concretize and make real his cosmos."[58] There is need for Melanesian themselves to put down in writing the concept of God found in traditional religion.

CONCLUSION

The existence of God or at least the existence of the spiritual realm seems to be universal in most cultures. People, who have not received any revelation or any missionary outreach, show some knowledge of God or the spiritual realm. Melanesians had invoked the spiritual realm where God is believed to abide long before the arrival of Christian missionaries. This natural knowledge helped the local people to understand what the missionaries were talking about.

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[56] Garry Trompf, "What has Happened to Melanesian 'Cargo Cults'?" in *Religious Movements in Melanesia Today* (ed. Wendy Flannery; Point, 4; Goroka; Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Social Economic Service, 1984), 29–51, at 29. See also Garry W. Trompf, "God as the Source of Wealth," *MJT* 3 (1987): 74–84.
[57] Trompf, "What has Happened to Melanesian 'Cargo Cults'?" 29.
[58] Narokobi, "What is Religious Experience for a Melanesian?" 69.

This makes me conclude that a human person using the power of natural reason can come to the knowledge of the existence of God or the spiritual realm. The nature of God may be different; the will of God may be in total contradiction with what Christians teach but the concept is always there.

Some would say that atheists do not have the concept of God. However, atheism is the denial of the existence of God. Hence, atheists have a concept of God, that is why they deny it. Denial presupposes existence. If God does not exist, there would be nothing to deny and atheism would not exist. As far as we are human beings, our reason leads us to the concept of God. Reason is the ground where communication from the spiritual realm can take place. Since the human person has the capacity to arrive at the concept of God, we can say: "The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself."[59] Even after these entire explanations one should not forget that God will remain a mystery to the human being. The human being is always called to that restless search for God.

I have presented the philosophical proofs for the existence of God. Every person can be convinced differently; some more, some less. When a proof for God's existence is presented and defended believers become enthusiastic. Ye, what is needed for a relationship with God is a personal experience, an encounter of an individual person with God. To know the will of God and live according to this will is one of the signs of an encounter. The knowledge we have by the natural power of reason is only about the existence and some of the attributes of God. The nature of God as monotheistic and trinitarian and what God's will is requires revelation. For this reason, natural reason and revelation have to complement each other.

[59] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 27.

HAPKAS CHRISTOLOGY AS RESISTANCE AND INNOVATION IN *THE MOUNTAIN*[*]

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Abstract
This essay assesses a *hapkas* christology in Papua New Guinea. A declaration of Jesus as "good man true" in Drusilla Modjeska's *The Mountain* is located in relation to *hapkas* themes of indigenous agency, communal transformation, and hybridity, each in dialogue with New Testament themes of genealogy, redemption as gift, and Jesus as the new Adam. This *hapkas* Jesus who is "good man true" is then placed in critical dialogue: first, with Melanesian masculine identity tropes as described in anthropological literature and second, with Papua New Guinean christologies, including *wantok*, brother, and protector. The argument is that a *hapkas* christology acts in ways that both resist and innovate in the reception of the gospel across cultures. This demonstrates how a received message of Christian mission can be creatively transformed in the crossing of cultures and a *hapkas* christology provides resources in the tasks of contextualisation in a rapidly globalising world.

Key Words
Christology, gospel, ancestor, genealogy, Drusilla Modjeska, post-colonial, indigenous

INTRODUCTION

In Mark 8:29, Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" It is a question asked in the particularity of time and space. As such, it can only be answered in particularity. This is evident in the response—"You are the messiah"—, which draws on the unique history of Old Testament hope and critiques the expansion of the Roman empire.

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[*] This is a reduced, revised, and particularised version of "Cultural Hybridity in Conversion: An Examination of *Hapkas* Christology as Resistance and Innovation in Drusilla Modjeska's *The Mountain*," *Mission Studies* 36 (2019): 416–41. My thanks to the peer reviewer of *Mission Studies* for initiating the possibility and the editors of *Mission Studies* and *MJT* for their constructive responses.

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How might the question be answered among diverse cultures? Can other cultures use different words? As they do, how might the backgrounds of their history and the context of their cultures generate christological critique? With these questions, the particularity of the christological question is equally an examination of the complex interactions between the one and the many, the particular and the global.

This essay will examine one response to Jesus' "Who do you say that I am?" question in a contemporary novel, *The Mountain.* Acclaimed by Moore as Papua New Guinea's (PNG's) best historical novel,[1] it is a story of love and loss set within the nation's transition to independence and quest for economic viability in a globalising world. Book one is set during the five years leading up to independence in PNG in 1975. It ends with a "gift child": a *hapkas* boy. Book two describes the boy's return as an adult, the child of an indigenous mother and a western father, to the land of his birth. The novel offers the following description of one Independence Day celebration:

> Of all the applause, of all the cheers, the greatest is for the Christian missions, the priests who cross the stadium with their crucifixes and their bibles. Bigger even than independence and the bird of paradise flag … The appearance of God in paradise … "Jesus" … "good man true" ... "He die on a tree. Very good. He die for PNG."[2]

What fascinates is not only the remarkably positive portrayal of conversion and transformation (the literary parallelism of the repetition of "applause" and "cheers" to clarify the focus on "Christian missions"), but, more intriguingly, a distinctly contextual response to the "Who do you say that I am?" question. In contemporary PNG, Jesus is not the messiah. Rather, he is "good man true," a term introduced by one of the fictional characters in relation to an understanding of indigenisation—"The appearance of God in paradise" who "die for PNG." The potential and limits of this contextual christology are examined in this paper.

This essay is driven by two interests. First, my personal story, including my childhood in Papua New Guinea, resulting in an ongoing interest, as an outsider to Melanesian cultures, into how that country is, and has been, located. Second, the potential of fiction as a source for theology. For missiologist Stanley Skreslet, fiction offers important insights that can expand "mission studies, especially by giving attention to women and non-

[1] C. Moore, "Crossing the Border into Fiction," *History Australia* 9 (2012): 249–50.
[2] D. Modjeska, *The Mountain* (Australia: Vintage, 2012), 291.

Western missionary actors."[3] Skreslet's claims are tested by the examination of one particular book, *The Mountain*, written by a woman (Drusilla Modjeska), with a focus on non-western characters. This essay tests Skreslet's challenge, reading "good man true" as a *hapkas* christology. This will occur in four steps: first, examining how in *The Mountain* themes of ancestor, gift child, and *hapkas* are developed through character and plot; second, positing a distinct christological shape to "good man true" ... "He die for PNG"; third, locating a *hapkas* christology in relation to Melanesian anthropologies, in particular the discussion of big man and great men; and fourth, placing this *hapkas* christology in dialogue with recent PNG christologies. What results is an indigenous response to the christological question: "Who do you say that I am?": You are "good man true" for PNG because you are the *hapkas* Jesus, gift from the ancestors.

Drusilla Modjeska as Author

Drusilla Modjeska is an English-born writer who has lived in PNG and Australia. She lived in PNG prior to independence, from 1966 to 1971. Then from 2004 onwards, she made frequent return visits to PNG, working with David Baker, to bring Ömie art to Australia.[4]

Author of nine works of non-fiction, Modjeska declares that *The Mountain* "is not a work of history, ethnography or anthropology. However … I draw upon the work of historians, linguists and anthropologists."[5] This includes the work of anthropologist, Elisabeth (Libi) Gnecci-Rusone, whom Modjeska utilises as she examines the ways in which the cultures of PNG and Christianity intersect.[6] Modjeska may claim *The Mountain* is a novel, yet historian Clive Moore notes that "the level of accuracy in descriptions of people and places is so good that any ex-PNG hands will find themselves making guesses."[7] The interplay between claims of fiction and academic research makes *The Mountain* an intriguing book to analyse.

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[3] S. Skreslet, *Comprehending Mission. The Questions, Methods, Themes, Problems, and Prospects of Missiology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2012), 188.

[4] This is documented in S.B. Balai and J. Ryan (eds), *Wisdom of the Mountain: Art of the Ömie* (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2009).

[5] Modjeska, *The Mountain*, 427.

[6] The work of Gnecci-Rusone is described in D. Modjeska, *Second Half First: A Memoir* (Sydney: Knopf Random House, 2015), 311, and Gnecci-Rusone is acknowledged in Modjeska, *Mountain*, 431.

[7] Moore, "Crossing the Border," 249–50.

While Modjeska claims *The Mountain* is fiction, the art she describes is real. The book's front cover is painted in the black lines distinctive of Omie art, while each chapter offers a reproduction of Ömie art.[8] In real life, *The Mountain* was illustrated by the tribe of people of whom it is telling a story. The curator of the National Gallery of Victoria, Gerard Vaughan, describes Ömie art "as one of the world's great art traditions."[9] In working with the National Gallery of Victoria, the Ömie people formed a collective, the Ömie Culture Group, who took the initiative of seeking external help in establishing a business. The decision-making process, which stretched over four years, was communal. The Ömie maintain authorship, delegating the older women to "authorise the telling of ancestor stories."[10]

In researching this article, I became aware of Ömie art held by Te Papa Tongarewa, the Museum of New Zealand. I was privileged to be able to visit and see four pieces as part of their Pacific collection.[11] The colour contrast is stunning, particularly the yellow and reds *of Omie Mountains, Eggs of the Dwarf Cassowary, Beaks of Blyth's Hornbill and Spots of the Wood-boring grub* alongside the white and blacks of *Ground-burrowing Spider*. The lines are strong and bold. Each piece suggests a unique way of looking at the world. For example, the criss-cross lattice lines of Tail-feathers of the swift when sitting in the tree invite a looking up into a two-dimensional world. A newsletter held by Te Papa provides information regarding Ömie culture and affirms the quality of the art.[12] The artistic techniques are described as

[8] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 428: "The Omie icons that appear at the head of each chapter of *The Mountain* are used with permission of Omie Artists and the Omie chiefs."
[9] G. Vaughan, "Foreword," in Balai and Ryan, *Wisdom*, 7.
[10] D. Modjeska in Balai and Ryan, *Wisdom*, 23.
[11] These are listed as: *Omie Mountains, Eggs of the Dwarf Cassowary, Beaks of Blyth's Hornbill and Spots of the Wood-boring grub* by Botha Kimmikimmi (FE012819); Ground-burrowing Spider by Brenda Kesi (FE012820); *Chief's prestige cloth* by Sarah Ugibari (FE012821); and *Tail-feathers of the Swift when sitting in the Tree* by Sarah Ugibari (FE012822). Five other pieces were not available for viewing (FE009993, FE 009991, FE009987, FE009995, and FE009988) but are described in the Te Papa Pacific Collections as coming from the Mt Lamington area, the mountain on which the Ömie live. See Balai and Judith Ryan, *Wisdom of the Mountains*, 89. My thanks to Nina Tonga and Grace Hutton, Te Papa Pacific Collections for their flexibility and willingness to access these art pieces for me on 7 September, 2016.
[12] Z. Schwimmer and S. Blunt, "Tapa Cloths of the Northern District, Papua-New Guinea," *Pacific Arts Newsletter* 9 (1979): 6–11.

sophisticated and precise, while the cloth is "artistically striking."[13] Techniques of abstraction are evident, while the Ömie style is distinct in colouring and design from neighbouring tribes. In some areas, the cloth is farmed, with trees carefully pruned to ensure that the tapa that is produced from the bark has no holes. These descriptions affirm that this is art, the creativity of a complex and well-organised culture.

The complexity of this interplay between fiction and real life, between art and the academy and across cultures is theorised by Modjeska in her memoir, *Second Half First*. Modjeska wrestles with how she, an English woman living in Australia, might write from a Papua New Guinean point-of-view. Modjeska finds agency when recalling how her earlier writing, her research into the biographies of women, had freed her from "the binary opposition of either/or—same or different, like or unlike, their culture or ours—shrinking the ground between."[14] Her earlier writings include a PhD on Australian women writers, later published as *Exiles at Home*. Hence, she writes with an academic training in how to read literature in dialogue with life. For Modjeska, "an artist is not a matter of surmounting, or of refusing, or even of juggling, but of bringing the values and knowledge of heart and belly into the work."[15] It involves the weaving of imagination, lived experience, and careful research. Modjeska acknowledges in *The Mountain* the value of letters and diaries from those who lived in PNG, along with an Australian Research Council fellowship, which she was awarded to investigate the interplay of race, gender, and the arts in post-colonial Papua New Guinea.[16] *The Mountain* is thus a creative narrating shaped by academic research in dialogue with real life detail.

My argument is not that Modjeska has written a christology. This is beyond the limits she has set; *The Mountain* is a novel. Rather, I follow Ricoeur, who argued that while authors invest meaning in a text, all texts have a surplus, in which a reader experiences new modes of being.[17] The *hapkas* christology I shall outline is surplus to Modjeska's intention, yet as I shall argue, is consistent with the lines of plot and character created by her

[13] Schwimmer and Blunt, "Tapa Cloths," 6.
[14] Modjeska, *Second Half First*, 283.
[15] D. Modjeska, *Stravinsky's Lunch* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 1999), 111.
[16] Modjeska, *Mountain,* 427–32.
[17] P. Riceour, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 88.

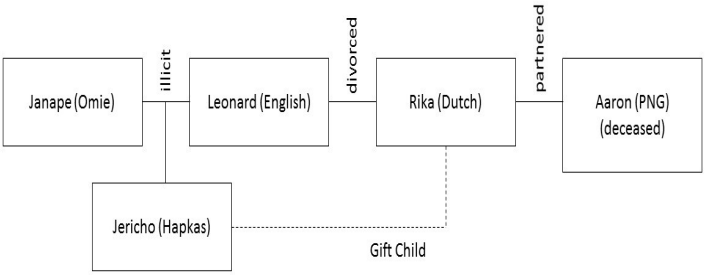
work.

TEXT: *THE MOUNTAIN*

The Mountain begins with a prologue. Set in 2005, Jericho is introduced, ready to return to PNG after a thirty-year absence. The book then jumps back in time (book one), narrating life in PNG between 1968 and 1973 through the eyes of Rika, Jericho's mother. Book two then tells of Jericho's return between 2005 and 2006 to the land of his birth. A final epilogue provides an unexpected twist, befitting a novel work of fiction. *The Mountain* contains themes including the role of ancestors, the gift of a child, and the development of *hapkas* play in post-colonial cultures.

a) "The ancestors give us Leonard"

The following chart summarises the birth narrative with regard to Jericho.[18]



Jericho is central to *The Mountain*'s plot development. He is described as "gift child" and *hapkas* boy. For the Ömie, the key actors in Jericho's birth and then return to PNG twenty-two years later, are the ancestors:

> The ancestors give us Leonard. We give you [Jericho] to Leonard. And you [Jericho] return. Ancestor gift. The child who left us, who we call Jericho, has returned, the man who make a great noise, blow down the walls. Jericho, the name from the ancestor story of Leonard.[19]

This speech, made in book two, by an Ömie chief, proclaims ancestor agency. The white man (Leonard) is not the active agent in the engagement

[18] My thanks to Lynne Taylor for her technical expertise in constructing the chart.
[19] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 351.

between cultures. Rather it is the ancestors who "give" Leonard.[20]

A theology of ancestors is introduced in book one when the main characters, Aaron and Rika, are approached by an old woman.

> *Aya* Aita wanted to know whether being baptised, which she wasn't, would mean her passage to paradise could be extended to include her sister … who, being dead, she hadn't seen for many years … Would she do better to be remain unbaptised, a woman of the old ways, and join her sister with the ancestors?[21]

The missionaries have arrived with the rite of baptism. This has introduced into an established tribal culture an alternative way of belonging and a different set of allegiances. It has generated *Aya* Aita's concern, that baptism would, in the afterlife, result in separation from those who had not been baptised. In asking the question, she is questioning agency. "She wasn't asking … *about* paradise … She was asking who *owned* this white-man knowledge."[22] It is a recognition of the value of knowledge, not as intellectual, but as it relates to the bearing of children.[23] This interaction, the question of who owns ancestor knowledge in relation to children, foreshadows the speech of the Ömie chief in book two. The white man might have knowledge, but so do the ancestors, who provide the child as the ancestor gift. This is a key theme of *The Mountain*. For the Ömie, all of life is a gift from the ancestors. One way that ancestors are understood is through the birth of children.

b) Gift child

The final chapter of book one of *The Mountain* is titled "The Decisive Moment." An Ömie woman arrives at Rika's house in Port Moresby with Jericho, a "gift child from the mountain."[24] The child has been sent to Rika,

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[20] This is an emerging pattern in the Pacific. R. Edmonds, *Migrations. Journeys in Time and Place* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2013), 143, notes the "direct human connection between the descendants of those who had fallen out in the colonial past." This account asserts indigenous agency, while avoiding hagiographical accounts of the missionary.

[21] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 205.

[22] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 205. Italics in original.

[23] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 206: "Martha didn't think it was wealth Aita was asking about, but babies. Hadn't she turned toward towards where the women were sitting? Hadn't she put her hands to her eye, made the shape of a camera?"

[24] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 256.

so that she can teach him "the new ways."[25]

Shocked, Rika realises that this child is the son of her husband, Leonard, who has slept with an Ömie girl, Janape, while doing research in her village. Book one began with Rika, childless and married to Leonard. It ends with Rika divorced from Leonard, recently widowed from Aaron, suddenly becoming mother to this "gift." Hybrid notions of kinship offer a different way of being in community.[26] For Rita this "gift child" is redemptive: "Could it be that redemption *was* possible? That she could return from the closed, dark place where she'd been these last few weeks? That fear and shame need not rule all of her life?"[27] Rika experiences redemption as individual, from the rule of fear and shame. Yet, her redemption is possible because of hybrid notions of kinship. In Christian theology, redemption is essentially woven with understandings of a child as gift.[28]

Book one is narrated through the eyes of Rika, book two through the eyes of Jericho, returning as an adult to his birth village. He hears the pronouncement by the Ömie village chief, both of ancestor agency and child. The gift has movement: a departure ("We give you [Jericho] to Leonard") and a reappearance ("And you return").[29] The return is in hope not only of individual redemption, but of communal redemption. This becomes clear to Jericho the next morning: "Standing in the morning sun with these bark-cloth women, Jericho is startled into a thought … Here is the mountain's wealth. Here is how he can help. Their cloth is art in any terms. It's contemporary, it's bold and it's beautiful."[30] The tense is passive. The thought ("Here is how he can help") comes to Jericho as he stands, among the bark-cloth, in continuity with the ancestors.

Between books one and two, Jericho has grown up and found work in art

[25] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 254.
[26] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 256: "'Children don't belong to just one person,' Aaron was saying … 'In our world children are adopted, or taken by other people in the family, in the clan. It's common. Not remarkable.'"
[27] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 256.
[28] For discussion of the role of the gift child in the cultures of Papua and New Guinea, see D. Richardson *Peace Child. An Unforgettable Story of Primitive Jungle Treachery in the 20th Century* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1974); and D. Richardson, *Eternity in their Hearts* (Bloomington: Bethany House, 2006). The link between understandings of a child as gift in *The Mountain* and the work of Richardson is the speculation of the author, not the Ömie people.
[29] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 351.
[30] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 353.

galleries in London. When he returns in book two, the Ömie village, needing economic sustainability, wants to engage in eco-tourism. But Jericho realises he can provide a different sort of redemption. He has "new ways,"—the skills and networks to place Ömie art among western investors.[31] In this way, he can be ancestor gift, an instrument in ensuring sustainable economic redemption for the village.

The redemption through Jericho, that is an individual gift for Rika in book one, becomes a gift for the village community in book two. The ancestors give and as a consequence, the western art gallery system is creatively engaged to sustain an indigenous people.

c) *Hapkas*

The word *hapkas* is introduced in book one, when Jericho is brought to Rika. It is thus defined in the narrative in relation to themes of ancestor and gift child. Jericho is *hapkas* biologically, from an Ömie birth mother and an English father.[32] The word is Tok Pisin, an official language of PNG. *Hapkas* is defined more fully in book two: "*Hapkas*. It's a great word. My kids use it all the time. They call themselves *hapkas.* I'm from the Sepik, their mother's from Milne Bay. It's a point of pride. Makes them interesting … Haven't you heard of hybridity."[33] In book one, set between 1968 and 1973, those who are *hapkas* live not in the privileged university quarters, but in Hohola, a local housing slum. In book two, set between 2005 and 2006, *hapkas* has become "a point of pride. Makes them interesting."

There is a further dimension of *hapkas* in the name Jericho. This is present in the speech by the Ömie village chief in book two, in which he pronounces Jericho as "the man who make a great noise, blow down the walls."[34] In the Old Testament, Joshua is an agent of salvation, who leads his people to "make a great noise" when attacking a Canaanite city, Jericho. Perhaps the Ömie village chief has got the name confused and Jericho is meant to be named Joshua. However, taking the use of Jericho as intentional offers an intriguing understanding of *hapkas* given that it invokes the presence in the Canaanite city of Jericho of Rahab, who shelters the spies in

[31] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 256. For more on this see Modjeska, *Mountain*; and Balai and Ryan, *Wisdom of the Mountains*.
[32] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 253.
[33] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 278. Italics in original.
[34] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 351.

Joshua 2. This sets up an interesting parallel with *The Mountain*, for just as Rahab is within the walls of Jericho, so Janape (Jericho's birth mother) is within the Ömie village. Is the parallel deliberate, a plan conceived (pun intended) by the ancestors?

This parallel would then suggest that Janape has "sheltered" Leonard, in a similar way that Rahab shelters the spies from Israel. I am not arguing that Rahab engaged in a sexual relationship with the spies (as Janape did with Leonard). Rather, I am noting the redemptive parallels, in which the actions of both Rahab and Janape involve them becoming the birthmothers of "hapkas" children who will be agents of redemption. This name of Jericho offers a subtle, yet transformative application of the Christian narrative, given that in Matthew 1, Rahab is named in the genealogy of Jesus as an ancestor of Jesus.[35] This makes Jesus "hapkas," enriched by the blood of a Canaanite woman. In this reading, the agency of Rahab/Ömie as indigenous women results in children, who are "hapkas," woven as ancestors into narratives of redemption. The "ancestor story of Leonard" has been co-opted by the Ömie to explain their actions, of how indigenous people act when "spies," whether those in the Joshua narrative or western researchers, conduct research among indigenous people.[36]

The term "hapkas" thus works at two levels. First, biologically, in the birth of Jericho. Second, religiously, in the transformative reading by the Ömie of the Scriptures, "the ancestor story of Leonard,"[37] in which Janape becomes Rahab and Jericho a "hapkas" redeemer in the ancestor line of Jesus. This invites a set of christological questions. Might the Ömie response to the question by Jesus ("Who do you say that I am?") involve themes of ancestor agency, gift child, and "hapkas"? Might this be an indigenous appropriation that explains why Jesus is "good man true" who "die for PNG"?

[35] Rahab's actions are commended in the New Testament in Heb 11:31 and Jas 2:25.

[36] For a detailed reading by an Old Testament scholar, see J. J. Krause, "Aesthetics of Production and Aesthetics of Reception in Analyzing Intertextuality: Illustrated with Joshua 2," *Biblica* 96 (2015): 416–27, who argues Rahab is presented as an example of faith in the God of Israel. Thanks to Dr Mark Brett for suggesting this reference and comments on an early draft of this paper.

[37] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 351.

AN INDIGENOUS CHRISTOLOGY IN NEW TESTAMENT DIALOGUE

Three themes in the text of *The Mountain* have been identified: ancestor agency, gift child, and "hapkas." Given the celebration of Jesus as "good man true" who "die for PNG", might these offer an indigenous Christology? It is unlikely that Modjeska explicitly sets out to offer an indigenous christology in *The Mountain*. It is, however, consistent with the call by Skreslet for missiology to read historical fiction from outside the West and consistent with moves within post-colonial theory to encourage writing that is "around, through, out of, alongside and against."[38] What follows therefore, while "surplus" to Modjeska's intention, is authentic to her writing: an imaginative christological engagement with her imaginative work. In response to the christological question ("Who do you say that I am?") we hear an Ömie answer: You are "good man true" for PNG because you are the "hapkas" Jesus, gift from ancestors. This christology will now be considered in dialogue with the New Testament.

We begin, first, with **ancestor**, which has potential correlations with an important dimension of New Testament christology. Matthew's Gospel begins by locating Jesus as descended from the ancestors who include David and Abraham (Matt 1:1–17). Luke's Gospel locates Jesus as descended from the ancestors back to Adam (Luke 3:23–38). Each genealogy has a different structure and content. Yet, each affirms the agency of God, active in human history. The need to explain faith through connection with ancestors also plays a significant role in the Old Testament books of Genesis and 1 Chronicles. Genesis contains seventeen genealogies. They play a role theologically in affirming God's agency in history and are structured to develop the flow of the narrative.[39] 1 Chronicles contains eighteen genealogies. These have a different structure to Genesis and are structured theologically to address issues of election and promise.[40] Naming ancestors is important in Scripture, both as a literary form and in affirming the agency of God, who is active in human history. This is most clearly embodied in the way Jesus is introduced in Matthew and Luke. The genealogy in Matthew

[38] A. Wendt, *Nuanua: Pacific Writing in English Since 1980* (Auckland: Auckland University Press 1995), 3.
[39] J. W. Wright, "Genealogy," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (ed. T. D. Alexander and D. W. Baker; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 345–50.
[40] J. H. Walton, "Genealogy," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books* (ed. B. T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 309–16.

affirms the agency of God in the reality of human life.[41] This is consistent with the understandings of the Ömie elders, who locate the begetting of children as the gift of ancestors, active in human history.

We turn secondly to **ancestor as gift**. The Synoptic Gospels begin with the birth of a child. This child will bring salvation (Matt 1:21) through the solidarity of being Immanuel, "God with us" (Matt 1:23). Paul interprets the "us" by locating the gift of salvation through Jesus in relation to the original ancestor, Adam. Christ is the one in whom eternal ancestry is located (1 Cor 15:21–22), which has ancestor links to Genesis 2:7 (1 Cor 15:45–49). This offers an ancestor Christology in relation to the gift of resurrection.[42] In Romans 5, Adam becomes a type, in relation to the entry of sin into the world. Both 1 Corinthians and Romans offer a christology of gift based on solidarity between Adam and the rest of humankind. Salvation is woven into human history in genealogy. The ancestors are active, and the weaving of salvation into human history is both explained and attained through genealogy.

We move thirdly to "**hapkas**." This can be developed in relation to being fully human and fully divine. In *The Mountain*, Jericho is understood as being both Ömie and English. He is, in blood, fully Ömie and fully English. One cannot take a "hapkas" and divide the one person internally into the tribal affiliations of their birth parents. A dual identity in one person is essential to the salvific role Jericho finds himself playing. Given this understand of hybridity, a clearer set of understandings of christology is clarified. In Jesus, we have full identification with humanity and full identification with divinity. He is both the son of Joseph and begotten of God, pain-bearer and divine. This dual identity is essential to his salvific role, in which the "unassumed is the unredeemed."[43] He is, in the words of the Chalcedonian definition of faith "one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, acknowledged in two natures without confusion, change, division or separation..."[44] The notion of "hapkas" as introduced in *The*

[41] For more, see S. Taylor, "Where Does Mission Come from? The Genealogy of Jesus as Deep Mission," *AJMS* 11.2 (2017): 28–35.

[42] Kreitzer, *Biblica*.

[43] The maxim of the Greek Fathers, including Athanasius, Cyril, and Gregory.

[44] Council of Chalcedon (451), *Definitio fidei* (G. Alberigo et al., [eds], *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Generaliumque Decreta*, vol. 1: *From Nicaea I to Nicaea II [325–787]* [Turnhout: Brepols, 2006], 137: ἕνα καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν Χριστὸν υἱὸν κύριον μονογενῆ, ἐν δύο φύσεσιν ἀσυγχύτως ἀτρέπτως ἀδιαιρέτως ἀχωρίστως γνωριζόμενον ... English translation in

Mountain is a contextual lens by which to appreciate the Christian claim for full humanity and full divinity.

Hence the three themes of *The Mountain*, in which the ancestor gift of a "hapkas" child becomes a source of redemption for his community, has rich christological resonances. Jericho is a new Adam for his family and clan. Essential to Jericho being a "good man true" for the Ömie people of PNG is a hybrid notion of kinship: "Children don't belong to just one person … children are adopted, or taken by other people in the family, in the clan. It's common. Not remarkable."[45] This is no accident but was planned by the ancestors from before time. In the "hapkas" person of Jericho comes redemption, a way for the Ömie, as family and clan, to flourish after colonisation. This requires sacrifice. To continue the christological links, Jericho's Ömie birth-mother, Janape, becomes a Mary figure. Her son is removed from her care, not by death on the cross but by the Ömie village. In both cases, it is for the sake of the tribe, because "children don't belong to just one person." The new Adam is located in sacrificial, redemptive communality. Jericho is an incarnation of both colonial and indigenous identity.

Thus far, I have addressed the christological question of "Who do you say that I am?" in relation to Ömie people by engaging plot and character of *The Mountain*. Biblical themes of genealogy, Christ as the new Adam, and Jesus' identity as fully human, fully divine have been brought into conversation with Jericho as a "hapkas" child who is ancestor gift. How does the christology of "good man true" sit in relation to cultural constructions of identity? This question can be addressed by examining Melanesian anthropologies and Papua New Guinean christologies.

MELANESIAN ANTHROPOLOGIES

My argument is that Melanesian anthropological perspectives allow us to see Jesus as "good man true" as a Christology of cultural critique. Anthropology has theorised power in Melanesian cultures through the tropes of great men and big men.[46] The contrasts between great men and big men in local cultures

Richard Price and Michael Gaddis, *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon*, vol. 2 (Translated Texts for Historians 45; rev. ed.; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 204.

[45] Modjeska, *Mountain,* 256.

[46] M. Strathern, "Introduction," in *Big Men and Great Men. Personifications of Power in Melanesia* (ed. M. Godelier and M. Strathern; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

is developed by Nicholas Modjeska.[47] Historically, "great men" was the title given to leaders who were known as warriors. They emerge in societies that prioritise hunting, fighting, and ceremony.[48] In these societies, social relations are reproduced by ritualised transactions. Influence is exerted through control of "the material and symbolic reproduction of their society."[49] This results in a hierarchical culture, with a strong tribal unity.[50]

In contrast, "big men" was the title given to leaders who were known for their ability to make deals.[51] They emerge in societies that prioritise gardening, pig husbandry, and exchange manoeuvring. Influence is exerted through production and exchange of wealth, in a society that values prestige-credit and gift-indebtedness. This results in a "new social order" that values "political economic entrepreneurs."[52] Modjeska applied the tropes of great men and big men to the societies of PNG, suggesting the titles arose in different social worlds. One social world is that of PNG in history. The other social world is PNG today: "The enchanted great men of a more heroic age have been displaced by political economic entrepreneurs."[53] Given this anthropological analysis of societies of PNG in general, how is Jericho positioned in *The Mountain*? How will he wield influence as an agent of

1991), 1–4, at 1. My thanks to Joel Robbins, for his suggestions after hearing a presentation of this paper at the International Association Mission Studies, Korea, August 2016.

[47] N. Modjeska, "Post-Ipomean Modernism: The Duna Example," in Godelier and Strathern, *Big Men and Great Men,* 234–55, at 240. The alert reader will note the shared last name of anthropologist Nicholas Modejeska, writing about great men and big men and author Drusilla Modjeska, writer of *The Mountain*, offering a "good man true" christology. In *The Mountain*, Rika is married to Leonard, an anthropologist from England, who conducts fieldwork among the Ömie people. In real life, when Drusilla Modjeska first lived in PNG, she was married to an anthropologist, Nicholas Modjeska, who conducted fieldwork among the Duna people. This is further evidence of the interplay between real life and academic research in *The Mountain*.

[48] Modjeska, *Big Men and Great Men*, 252.

[49] Modjeska, *Big Men and Great Men*, 238.

[50] Modjeska, *Big Men and Great Men*, 249.

[51] Modjeska, *Big Men and Great Men*, 240. For an examination of big man funeral rites, see G. Bustos, "Bikman and the Text in Context: Contextualizing the Gospel in Papua New Guinea," in *Living in the Family of Jesus. Critical Contextualization in Melanesia and Beyond* (ed. William Kenny Longgar and Tim Meadowcroft; Archer Studies in Pacific Christianity; Auckland; Archer Press, 2016), 101–126. Bustos examines how this big man ritual has been incorporated into the Good Friday liturgy, to honour Jesus' death.

[52] Modjeska, *Big Men and Great Men*, 252–53.

[53] Modjeska, *Big Men and Great Men*, 253.

redemption for his people?

Jericho is certainly not a great man by these definitions. Raised in London, he has no ability in hunting and ceremony. Returning to PNG, he makes no moves to bring war to save his people.

Is Jericho then a big man? Jericho does certainly bring influence through his access to the art networks of London. He also possesses skill in the exchange manoeuvring necessary for Ömie art to be sold to western investors. Thus, Jericho does embody one dimension of the big man. But unlike the big man, he is the boy from Hohola, carrying the stigma of being "hapkas" and being raised in another country. He is not likely to possess the language skills needed to communicate as a big man. Further, he is not a wealth creator. He does not have skills in pig husbandry and thus cannot exert influence through production.

In *The Mountain*, Jericho is portrayed as able only to recognise gift, rather than produce gift. "Here is the mountain's wealth. Here is how he can help. Their cloth is art in any terms. It's contemporary, it's bold and it's beautiful."[54] Thus he can only act as a big man from below. His task is to lift up the Ömie art, to give it pride of place. In so doing, he is not honouring his own production, but that of the Ömie women. Modjeska describes the role of the *duvahe*, Ömie women who make the painting. She names them as chiefs, with an authority not from lineage but from wisdom. They have a "*moral* authority" gained because they are "the custodians of the knowledge and the trees, and the dyes, and the designs, and the stories told through the cloth."[55] Using the categories of Melanesian anthropology, Jericho is neither great man nor big man. Rather he is "hapkas" man from below. Jericho is using his skill in exchange manoeuvring, first to move between Ömie culture and western culture, second in lifting high not the men but the women, third in elevating not his production but the production of his tribe.

Anthropology, particularly when considered in relation to Melanesian culture, enriches the christological echoes of Jericho in *The Mountain*, clarifying modes of resistance and innovation. The titles of great man and big man bring into sharp relief the description in *The Mountain* of Jesus as "good man true." Jesus will die for PNG, not as a warrior leader nor as a deal maker. He is being defined in innovative resistance to common understandings of leadership within the societies of PNG. This is a hybrid—

[54] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 353.
[55] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 215 and 220. Italics in original.

"hapkas" even—christology, in which the identity of Christ is located in relation to culture, in ways resistant and innovative, continuous and discontinuous. Jesus is a "man" in ways continuous with great man and big man; he is "good," in ways discontinuous with understandings of leaders as great and big.

A common critique of contextual theologies is that they prioritise culture over gospel. This is not the case when "good man true" is placed alongside the Melanesian cultural understandings theorised by anthropology. In social worlds that value the great man and the big man, Jesus is the good man. He is neither a warrior leader nor an entrepreneurial transactor like Jericho. He becomes a redeemer of his people not through fighting, hunting, producing, or dealing but through service across cultures. Yes, Jericho is a networker, not because he is a political economic entrepreneur but because he is ancestor gift. Yes, the ancestors are from a more heroic age but they work not by recalling the past but in embracing a future in which the "hapkas" Jericho is a conduit for transforming redemption across the richness of two cultures: one art-making (Ömie), the other art-valuing (western). Yes, Jericho is a male, but as a "good man true," he lifts up the women of his tribe, acting as curator for their custodial knowledge and moral authority. This argument is based on reading anthropology, exploring what the full humanity of "Who do you say that I am?" might mean for the Ömie of PNG.

CHRISTOLOGIES IN PNG

We have considered regional anthropologies in the Melanesian cultures of Oceania. How does the Christology of "good man true" sit in relation to the christologies of PNG? *Melanesian Journal of Theology* becomes a significant gift, a scholarship spanning over thirty years. There is no evidence of "hapkas" being used. This suggests that *The Mountain* is offering something unique. However, three christologies are present: those of Christ as "wantok," brother, and "tatapa" (protector). Each will be discussed in relation to "hapkas" themes of ancestor, gift, and identity as fully human, fully divine.

Christ as "wantok" is a prominent theme. Tanda argues that all sectors of Melanesian society are interwoven through the "wantok" system,[56] while Mani argues "wantok" must be "an essential element in any Melanesian

[56] P. A. Tanda, "An Analytical Evaluation of the Effects of the Wantok System in the South Sea Evangelical Church of Papua New Guinea," *MJT* 27 (2011): 6–39, at 6.

theology or missiology."[57] The "wantok" system provides an understanding of communal lifestyle. "Wantok" is, like "hapkas" a term from Tok Pisin, an official language of PNG and refers to a way of being in community, a "family based system that seeks to create new relationships to ensure that life is not threatened."[58] Reciprocal behaviours like give and take are priorities in the strengthening of relationships. This becomes a social security system, part of the Melanesian Way,[59] by which the vulnerable and needy are cared for.

Having clarified the history, Mani then examines the changes in PNG post-independence. He argues that individualism, produced by western education and the embrace of western ethics, has undermined the values of the "wantok" system.[60] It has been negatively connected with corruption.[61]

Can "wantok" be redeemed? Mani suggests there are traces of the "wantok" system in both Old and New Testaments, and in particular develops Hebrews 2:10–15. All humanity is treated as "wantoks" because Jesus Christ is our "wantok."[62] Hence, the "wantok" system is God-given and God-used, "inwardly, to gather for tribal relationships; and outwardly to search for new relationships."[63] Working with the gospels, Cabrido suggests that in the encounter with the Syro-Phonecian woman (Matt 15:21–28), Jesus can be understood as working within a "wantok" framework. This includes, from a Melanesian perspective, Jesus' gift of initiating a relationship, not only with her but also communally with her tribe.[64] "Jesus did not only heal a sick daughter. He began the healing of relationships, which—for a Melanesian—is the mark of wholeness and salvation ... In time, with His resurrection, the *wantok bilong Jisas* will include ... the 'least', lowly ones."[65] This reading, in understanding Jesus as the "wantok"

[57] M. Mani, "A Theological and Missiological Response to the *Wantok* System in Melanesia," in Longgar and Meadowcroft, *Living in the Family*, 57–78, at 78.
[58] Mani, *Living in the Family*, 60.
[59] B. Narakobi, *The Melanesian Way* (Port Moresby: Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, 1980), 7.
[60] Similarly, Ako Arua and Dfaniel John Eka, "Wantok System," *MJT* 18.1 (2002): 6–17, at 9: "The wantok system has become a personal thing, rather than a group-oriented thing."
[61] Arua and Eka, "Wantok System"; and Tanda, "An Analytical Evaluation."
[62] Mani, *Living in the Family*, 67–68.
[63] Mani, *Living in the Family*, 72.
[64] John Aranda Cabrido, "*Wantok Jisas*: Reading Matthew's Story of the Canaanite Woman (15:21–28) in a Melanesian Context," *MJT* 30.1 (2014): 17–35, at 30–31.
[65] Cabrido, "*Wantok Jisas*," 31.

of the vulnerable, challenges notions of nepotism[66] and favouritism seen in post-independence understandings of "wantok." This is a creative christology. It is in continuity with understandings of "wantok" as shaped by a Melanesian worldview, in which "one cannot act ethically without a belief in the supernatural."[67] It resists "wantok" as favourite. Instead, it locates "wantok" in relation to Jesus, who is a "good man" who acts in ways that are sacrificial and attentive not to favourites—including "big men" and "strong men"—but to those who are vulnerable and marginalised.

It could be argued that "hapkas" would enrich this "wantok" theology. If Jesus is fully human and fully divine, then he is not only a "good man" exemplar. He is also the empowering channel through whom any individual can "in Christ" participate in the fully divine ethical acting of Jesus, the true "wantok."

A second Melanesian christology is that of Christ as **brother**. Dan Seeland reflects on the impact of urbanisation on tribal identity and notes that despite a post-independence increase in "the complex web of relationships that now characterises Melanesia ... primary identity still resides with the clan."[68] He describes the historical importance of relationships with neighbouring ethnic groups, in the form of alliances and trading partnerships. "Prosperity, for the individual, as well as the clan, is safeguarded through the principle of reciprocity."[69] Seeland thus suggests a way of relating shaped by ethics, as people act in a manner consistent with the pattern of brotherhood. This includes those outside the clan: "Behaviour, not blood, seems to be the key."[70] Having conducted this post-independence anthropology, Seeland then develops a christology, working primarily with Romans 8:29, in which Christ is the "firstborn among many brothers." This has a number of implications in relation to "hapkas" themes of ancestor, gift, and identity. First, the focus on "firstborn" resonates with an ancestor christology. Second, the affirmation of "hapkas" christology becomes a way of working across clan boundaries not only by marriage and not only in contemporary PNG, but in living from historic patterns of reciprocity. Third,

[66] Andrew Murray, "What About the *Wantok* System?" *MJT* 32.2 (2016): 134–147, at 137.
[67] Mani, *Living in the Family*, 59.
[68] Dan Seeland, "Christ my Brother: Shifting Primary Identity in Melanesia from Clan to Christ," *MJT* 22.2 (2006): 60–73, at 61.
[69] Seeland, "Christ my Brother," 62.
[70] Seeland, "Christ my Brother," 64.

Seeland's observation that behaviour, not blood is the key, provides a christological reframing of "good man true." Jesus comes, not as big man or great man but as a good man, acting like a brother. The act of reciprocity initiated by Jesus the firstborn brother is a sacrifice in which the life of the firstborn is gifted in order to re-build an alliance with the human clan.[71] Fourth, the act of reciprocity is framed by Seeland as a relationship of fulfilment rather than a replacement. It is not that Christianity replaces the existing clan relationships. "Properly understood, however, Jesus' call to discipleship is not a call to love the clan less. It is a call to love Christ more."[72] Hence Seeland's use of Romans and his understanding of Christ as firstborn provides a distinctly ethical christology.

However, further work is required, given that Seeland seems to view Jesus not as a person in a clan from Galilee and a tribe from Israel, but as an individual. Seeland does not seem to recognise that at the time of the writing of Romans, Christianity understood itself as still within the tribe of Judaism. The complex work done by Paul in Romans 9–11 is about trying to maintain the clan connections and honour the ancestor Abraham. These further trajectories might strengthen Seeland's brother christology.

Christ as "tatapa" (protector) is a theology articulated by the Teop people, who live in North Bougainville Province. In Teop understandings, the practice of "tatapa" was undertaken daily, as evening fell. The practice—of planting stakes around the circumference of the village, spreading a powder from the fruits of a special tree and chanting to the ancestors—was understood to create an invisible protective shield, or hedge. This protected the whole village from attack by evil spirits. Ivihi then develops a christology of protection: "For Christians today, the *tatapa* represents Jesus as protector."[73] This christology is sourced from biblical images including God as fortress (Jer 16:19; Ps 91:2), hedge (Job 1:10), and shield (Eph 6:16; Ps 91:4). Christ as the protector is like a big man (warrior), in that he takes the place of the spirits of the ancestors, who had been strong warriors, in order to drive away the evil spirits. The protection comes from Christ, who has entered the worldview of these people, as fully a Teop of North Bougainville as any ancestor warrior. Yet this Christ is a stronger big man, given that as one person, he provides the protection previously needing to be provided by

[71] This has similarities with Cabrido's "wantok Jisas" reading of Matt 15:21–28.
[72] Seeland, "Christ my Brother," 65.
[73] Ezekiel Ivihi, "Tatapa: Christ the Protector," *MJT* 26.2 (2010): 19–21, at 20.

many ancestor warriors. This christology works within existing cultural frameworks, responding to a world inhabited by spirits. "Christians cannot eliminate evil spirits; nevertheless, God will punish evil spirits in the fiery furnace."[74] This "tatapa" christology offers an indirect link to the good man, with Christ able to deliver the righteous through sacrifice, not strength.

Locating a "hapkas" Jesus who is "good man true" in relation to other Melanesian christologies suggests a christology that is unique, yet has strong resonances. "Hapkas" is a generative yet critical theology. It provides ways to move beyond tribalism, inviting a "wantok" theology to be located not in tribal identity, but in micro-acts of neighborliness. This is clarified by the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). It could be argued that the relationships between Samaritan and Jew are located historically in "hapkas" identities. Yet in the parable, those who inherit eternal life in "hapkas" Christ are those who are "good man true" neighbours. This is defined not by tribal identity but by how one treats those who are need. What remains is for all who hear to "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37). Hence the "wantok" is "tapata" for all "brothers" (and "sisters"), not through tribal identity but through inclusion in the "hapkas" Jesus, gift from the ancient ancestor seeking to redeem all peoples.

Conclusion

In sum, I have examined *The Mountain*, paying attention to author and text, to argue for themes of ancestor, gift, and "hapkas" agency. I have located these themes in conversation with biblical themes of Jesus as the new Adam, gift from the genealogy of Israel, fully human and fully divine. This provides a way for the Ömie people to respond to the christological question of "Who do you say that I am?": You are "good man true" for PNG because you are the "hapkas" Jesus, gift from ancestors. This is a christology of resistance and innovation; affirming ancestor agency yet challenging Melanesian masculinity tropes.

This "hapkas" Ömie christology is an imaginative exercise by the author. It is not the stated intention of Drusilla Modjeska, nor the articulation of the Ömie people or a living Ömie theologian. Nevertheless, when located in relation to Melanesian cultural tropes of great men and big men, it offers a creative christology that shares lines of continuity and discontinuity with

[74] Ivihi, "Tatapa," 21.

Melanesian cultural constructions of power and identity, leadership, and relationships. It demonstrates that contextualisations of theology, when viewed from within host cultures, are both generative and critical. "Hapkas" provides a model of conversion of gospel reception as a transformation within existing cultural frames, in ways that critiques existing notions of power and identity.

In developing its christology, the early church applied a range of titles to Jesus. The titles were understood to offer important clues in understanding Christian faith. Another way to respect particularity in christology has been to assert formulations like a Lukan or Pauline christology. The intention of these christologies is not to suggest a full disclosure of the nature and work of Christ, but rather to appreciate particularity and affirm specific communities. In a similar way, the development of a "hapkas" christology in this essay is used to foreground the nature and potential of indigenous titles as a distinct and unique contribution, without making claims for a full disclosure of the nature and work of Christ. Further work is needed to consider how hapkas christologies might work in other contexts, including PNG and Oceania and to compare and contrast with Creole christologies developing in the United States.[75]

Such are the possibilities when fiction is examined christologically within the particularity of the cultures from which they emerge. It allows us to hear an Ömie answer to the christological question: "Who do you say that I am?": You are "good man true" for PNG because you are the "hapkas" Jesus, gift from ancestors.

[75] C. P. DeYoung, *Becoming Like Creoles: Living and Leading at the Intersections of Injustice, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019).

SPEAK OF THE DEVIL: *SUANGGI*, SATAN, AND SPIRITUAL HEALING IN WEST PAPUA*

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Abstract

Indonesian occupation in West Papua over the last six decades has catalysed endemic inter-generational trauma, and a recent report from the region relates accounts of spiritual attack, possession, and spiritual healing. While the West Papuan culture is rich in accounts of spiritual activity by local spirits, or *suanggi*, the secularising influence of modernity has left the church with little to say or do in response to such spiritual attacks. This article seeks to remedy this by engaging theologically with the West Papuan spiritual reality of spirits, *suanggi*, and spiritual healing. This paper begins by outlining the problem that the form of Christianity brought to West Papua by western missionaries has no mechanism for addressing the phenomena of *suanggi*. The proposed solution is to search for authentic ways to engage theologically with the experiences of West Papuans and *suanggi*. A way forward will be demonstrated by reflecting theologically on one case of spiritual attack and subsequent healing.

Key Words

West Papua, Melanesia, exorcism, spiritual healing, developing world, trauma, political theology

A devout Christian West Papuan woman was going about her day when she felt an unexpected pain. By the end of the day, she could not move and was forced to bedrest. Her father was a Christian pastor, and the whole community joined in prayer for her. When she did not show signs of improvement, they called for a *dukun*, a traditional healer, who was also an East Timorese Roman Catholic priest living in West Papua. The *dukun* arrived and divined that the source of illness was outside the house. The family discovered bones buried just outside the front door. When the bones were removed, the woman immediately recovered. The family speculates that a black magic curse using harmful spirits known as *suanggi* had been

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intended for the woman's husband due to a business disagreement, but because she had been the first person to walk out the door the curse had landed on her.

INTRODUCTION

The woman in this story is the sister of a West Papuan refugee in Australia, who shared with me this account of his firsthand experience with *suanggi* and *dukun*. Similar stories abound in West Papua and across Melanesia. While it is easy from a western perspective to dismiss these stories as fables, folk legends, or "primitive" explanations of illness or misfortune, this research project challenges those *a priori* assumptions and engages through theological reflection with a culture steeped in spirits.

The history of West Papua is complex and contested. The Dutch formally colonised West Papua at the end of the nineteenth century. When the Dutch left the region at the start of the 1960s, Indonesia's military swept in, and has occupied the land ever since. Indigenous West Papuans identify as Melanesian, not as Indonesian, and have been struggling for independence and self-determination ever since. West Papuans are at a critical point in their struggle for independence from Indonesia, which has been found to be in gross violations of human rights and injustice. Despite promises of self-determination and political representation by the Indonesian government,[1] reports from external human rights groups,[2] academic researchers,[3] as well as the World Council of Churches[4] have documented torture, extra-judicial killings, and other traumas inflicted upon the indigenous peoples. At Ipenburg describes the Indonesian oppression as systematic

[1] Of significant note is the 2001 law on "special autonomy" for West Papua, drafted by indigenous Papuans and ratified by the Indonesian government. However, the implementation of the law has been globally recognised as ineffective in fulfilling the promises made by Indonesia.

[2] Human Rights Watch, "Out of Sight: Endemic Abuse and Impunity in Papua's Central Highlands," *Human Rights Watch* 19/10 (2007): 1–81.

[3] Susan J. Rees and Derek Silove, "Speaking Out about Human Rights and Health in West Papua," *Lancet* 370, no. 9588 (2007): 637–639. See also Susan J. Rees, R. van de Pas, D. Silove, and M. Kareth, "Health and Human Security in West Papua," *Medical Journal of Australia* 189 no. 11/12, (2008): 641-643.

[4] World Council of Churches Executive Committee Statement (22–28 May, 2019, Bossey Switzerland), *Concern and Solidarity for West Papua* (www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/the-wccc-executive-committee-statement-concern-and-solidarity-for-west-papua).

dehumanisation.[5] Even as the struggle for self-determination and liberation continues, the material fabric of Christian commitments to justice, peace, and love of neighbour are a source of contention among West Papuan churches.[6]

A second and related factor that fuels the exigency of this conversation is the widespread trauma throughout the country. Inter-generational trauma is endemic not only in those residing in West Papua[7] but also in West Papuans who have emmigrated to other countries.[8] There are limited resources available to address this trauma, which can have lasting mental, spiritual, and physical symptoms affecting subsequent generations.[9] Prominent West Papuan activist, pastor, and theologian Rev Dr Benny Giay founded a theological school "specifically dedicated to train local pastors how to deal with the past trauma, because in 1980s up until the year 2000, the area was declared a military operation zone. There's a lot of trauma, where people lost many lives."[10] Unfortunately, little has changed in the six decades of Indonesian military occupation in regards to the trauma inflicted upon West Papuans. As the West Papuan people continue to be traumatised by this occupation, a report emerged from an Australian man praying for spiritual healing as a means to address spiritual trauma. During this process, the healer came to believe that West Papuans were being afflicted not only through political and spiritual trauma but also by dark spiritual powers. Five audio

[5] At Ipenburg, "Regaining Humanness: The Papuan Struggle for Human Rights," paper presented to the International Association for Mission Studies, XIIth Quadrennial International Conference, Balatonfüred, Hungary, 2008.

[6] For a more thorough account of the complexities of the inter and intra-church tension on the role of Christianity in the struggle for self-determination, see chapter three of Marcus Campbell, "Religion and Resistance in West Papua: The Role of Christianity in the Struggle for peace and justice," (MA diss., Sydney, 2017).

[7] Rees, "Speaking Out About Human Rights and Health in West Papua", 637.

[8] Susan J. Rees and Derek Silove, "Sakit Hati: A State of Chronic Mental Distress Related to Resentment and Anger amongst West Papuan Refugees Exposed to Persecution," *Social Science & Medicine* 73 (2007): 103–110.

[9] Joseph Westermeyer, M. Bouafuely, J. Neider, and A. Callies, "Somatization among Refugees: An Epidemiologie Study," *Psychosomatics* 30 (1989): 34–43.

[10] Tanenbaum Center For Interreligious Understanding, "Toward a Zone of Peace: The Rev Dr Benny Giay, West Papua, Indonesia," in *Peacemakers in Action: Profiles of Religion in Conflict Resolution* (ed. David Little; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 402–428, at 418.

recordings summarising accounts of spiritual healing were given to the Federal Republic of West Papua (FRWP) by the spiritual healer.[11]

These accounts of spirit attacks and spiritual healing in West Papua from 2018 provided by the FRWP merit 1) a theological analysis aimed at thickening of Christian understanding of spirituality by looking at the world through a West Papuan cultural lens, and 2) an exploration of modes and models within Christian literature to address this spiritual activity. The goal of this paper, a first step in the research project, is to thicken our understanding of spirituality and incarnational theology in light of the spiritual healings reported in West Papua.

First, we will examine the problem of the "excluded middle," a concept noted by missiologist Paul Hiebert in 1982. The problem he expounds upon is the lack of answers that modern western Christianity has in addressing real world problems arising from "spirits of this world, to local ancestors and ghosts, or to the souls of animals."[12] This problem arises from a coupling of theology to a dualistic modern worldview.

The proposed solution to this problem is a serious engagement with spiritual phenomena, such as *suanggi*, possession, exorcism, spiritual attack, and spiritual healing, in West Papuan cultural terms. *Suanggi*, an Indonesian word for spirit will be used throughout this paper as it is the word used by the spiritual healer and the West Papuan reference team.[13] We cannot, of

[11] These case studies were recorded after the Australian man had returned to Australia from a recent trip to West Papua. After consultation with FRWP on a way to address what he identified as spiritual attacks, he recorded his reflections on these cases and gave them to FRWP. The FRWP subsequently commissioned the Centre for Research in Religion and Social Policy, part of the University of Divinity, Melbourne, to analyse these accounts. This paper is not the analysis of those accounts, but uses those accounts as a starting place to begin a larger discussion of the possibilities and challenges of integrating cultural realities of spirits into Christian theology. A biographical note: I, the writer of this paper, am not West Papuan, and was raised and trained in western theological methods. I am indebted to the West Papuans and others on the reference team with extensive experience and knowledge of West Papua for their insights, comments, and stories that shape this project.

[12] Paul G. Hiebert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," *Missiology: An International Review* 10 (1982): 35–47, at 43.

[13] A note on the word *suanggi*: there are 254 tribal languages spoken in West Papua, and while each uses a different word to describe the spirits, there is a common understanding that this Malay-Indonesian word here used refers to the same phenomena. (An alternate spelling used by Indonesians in other parts is *suwanggi* but the West Papuans use *suanggi*.) *Suanggi* can refer to good or bad spirits akin to angels or demons as well as to the spirits that inhabit natural organic or inorganic objects. *Suanggi* can also refer to the practice of using black magic to

course, simply undo the secularising work of modernity that made taboo all talk of local spiritual events from Christian discourse and Christian churches; however, we can challenge those taboos by acknowledging the spiritual realities in West Papua. This clears the way for movement towards a holistic theology that empowers discourse around *suanggi* and spirits through biblical and theological reflection. We will then use the tools we develop to analyse one of the case studies recorded by the spiritual healer as an example of a way forward.

This paper is a first step in uncovering an under-analysed dimension of spirituality. Numerous interdisciplinary questions of the anthropological, sociological, psychological, and political implications arise that we simply do not have the breadth or resources to cover in the scope of this paper.[14]

THE EXCLUDED MIDDLE IN WEST PAPUA

The research problem, simply stated, is that Christendom influenced by western modernist theology does not have terms or even space for a non-scientific process of exorcism and spiritual healing. Paul Hiebert coined this the "excluded middle", a vacuum in discourse of that which, in West Papuan terms and culture, connects local spirits, ancestors, and possessions to everyday experiences.[15] In Hiebert's model, western Christians view the world as that which is visible (or material) and that which is invisible (immaterial things like God, heaven, and hell). The excluded middle refers to those things that are both immaterial and of this world, such as spirits. Though the imported western Christianity does not have the terminology or

harness these spirits. Among West Papuans, the term is also used disparagingly for Indonesian spies.

[14] In a similar vein, while there is assuredly much of value to be mined from comparisons to other studies of witchcraft or indigenous spirituality in other Melanesian contexts, those fall outside the scope of this paper for two reasons. The first is simply the pragmatics of space. The second reason is that most, if not all, of the theological reflections (as opposed to the literature dealing with the pragmatics of sorcery-based violence) make the same *a priori* assumption about local spirits. That is, a scientific view of the world supersedes and replaces a spirit-based view of the world.

[15] For a more sustained treatment of the effects this "excluded middle" has had on Melanesian theology, see William K. Longgar, "Authenticating Melanesian Biblical Theology: A Response to Foreign Theologies" in *Living in the Family of Jesus: Critical Contextualization in Melanesia and Beyond* (ed. William K. Longgar and Tim Meadowcroft; Archer Studies in Pacific Christianity; Auckland: Archer Press, 2016), 29–56.

theology to address these phenomena, the West Papuans have not abandoned their local spirits, and neither have the spirits abandoned West Papua.

Unpacking the spiritual reality in West Papua is complex to say the least.[16] West Papua is home to more than 250 tribes, each with its own local customs and beliefs. "Each of the hundreds of distinctive, largely tribal, language-based culture groups inhabited their own localised cosmos and developed unique traditions, customs and mythology based on their experiences that acted to help make sense of their lives."[17] The spiritual beliefs were thus born from a relationship with the land. Adding to the diverse landscape of spiritual beliefs, even different families within the same tribe may have different language and beliefs about *suanggi*. There are some overarching themes that are common throughout indigenous beliefs. *Suanggi* can refer to ancestor spirits, personal spiritual beings akin to angels or demons, or the spirits that inhabit inanimate objects in nature. *Suanggi* can be good or bad. There is not a clear distinction between "black" and "white" spiritual practices. A person may perform rituals to ensure safety and a successful harvest and at the same time perform rituals to curse an enemy.

Operating simultaneously in the West Papuan consciousness is a dimension of Christian belief brought in by missionaries beginning in 1855. Though slow to take root in the nineteenth century, Christianity spread rapidly throughout West Papua in the first half of the twentieth century, resulting in a current estimate of more than 70% of indigenous West Papuans claiming Christianity as their religion. The spread of Christianity brought many positive social changes, including an end to the payback killings and a growing sense of a national identity. Most indigenous West Papuans view the spread of Christianity as a positive influence over the region.

When Christianity spread to West Papua, it was accompanied by the missionaries' modernist worldview.[18] An oft-quoted signpost of liberal

[16] For a deeper unpacking of the complexities of religion on West Papua, see Gary W. Trompf, *Melanesian Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press Cambridge, UK, 1991); Gary W. Trompf, *Payback: The Logic of Retribution in Melanesian Religions* (Cambridge: Camabridge University Press, 1994); and Susanna G. Rizzo, "From Paradise Lost to Promised Land: Christianity and the Rise of West Papuan Nationalism" (PhD diss., Wollongong, 2004).
[17] Campbell, "Religion and Resistance in West Papua," 33.
[18] Renowned missiologist Lesslie Newbigin, *Honest Religion for Secular Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 18, observed that from this secular-modern worldview, western Christian missionaries inadvertently acted as one of the biggest propagators of secularisation across the globe.

theology's abandonment of the supernatural at work in this world is from an essay on demythologisation by Rudolf Bultmann, perhaps the most influential New Testament scholar in the twentieth century: "One cannot use an electric light and the radio, or make use of modern medicine and clinical resources in cases of illness, and at the same time believe in the spirit- and wonder-world of the New Testament."[19] This liberal protestant theology—stemming from a line that includes Spinoza (although a Jew, an important conversation partner in the development of western Christian theology), Hegel, D. F. Strauss, and Harnack—has led to suspicion if not outright incredulity towards any talk of demons, angels, miracles, and certainly nature spirits or ancestor spirits amongst theologians or in churches.[20]

Religion for the West has been built upon abstract and propositional truth claims whereas for Melanesians—including West Papuans—"religion is experience rather than knowledge … It is not concerned with propositional truth, but with a demonstration of power in daily life."[21] The western church, largely, has ignored those parts of culture that do not fit in with a modernist worldview of the "supernatural." Even the word "supernatural" indicates a western outlook of delineating the natural from the spiritual; on the other hand, "the Melanesian is born to the knowledge that he lives and works within a spirit world."[22] But West Papuans have been asked to leave behind

[19] Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 18. While Bultmann is often quoted as anti-supernatural, David Congdon, "Demystifying the Program of Demythologizing: Rudolf Bultmann's Theological Hermeneutics," *Harvard Theological Review* 110 (2017): 1–23, at 21, writes convincingly that Bultmann's aim was not to tie theology and Biblical studies to a modern worldview, but in fact to provide the tools to critique all worldviews, especially against the German church's adoption of the Nazi party's politicisation of modern ideologies.

[20] This is, of course, a generalisation for the sake of argument. There are pockets of Christianity that have emerged from post-modernity that have acknowledged the shortcomings of this rationalist, modernist outlook. Walter Wink noted modernism's inadequacy in meeting human needs three decades ago, and a shift towards pneumatology has led to openness in theological circles towards the spiritual realm. This openness, it seems, has not spread into West Papuan Christianity as reported by the spiritual healer, recent refugees, or other missionaries I have spoken with. For more on the pneumatological turn, see Amos Yong, "On Binding and Loosing the Spirits: Navigating and Engaging a Spirit-filled World," in *Interdisciplinary and Religio-Cultural Discourses on a Spirit-Filled World* (ed. V. Karkkainen, K. Kim, and A. Yong; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 1–14.

[21] Marilyn Rowsome, "Melanesian Traditional Religion," *MJT* 17/2 (2001): 36–56, at 37.

[22] Bernard M. Narokobi, "What is Religious Experience for a Melanesian?" in *Christ in Melanesia: Exploring Theological Issues* (ed. James Knight; Goroka, PNG: Melanesian

that which does not fit into a modern worldview. An Australian West Papuan relates, "One of the trends now is, embrace your culture, embrace your culture. But only selections from our culture. The dark parts like *suanggi* are taboo to talk about and left out." The reality of the situation is that for most West Papuan Christians, the tribal traditions are not left behind, but merely shut out of the Christian conversations.

Benny Giay reflects on the failure of western Christianity to address indigenous spirituality:

> I think Christianity as it has been preached by Western missionaries in West Papua for years has destroyed some of the essential elements of Christian values found in Papuan culture. Christianity as Western missionaries have presented to Papuans overemphasized one element—restoring man's relationship to God—while neglecting social and ecological dimensions.
>
> From the West Papuans' cultural viewpoint, man is in trouble and going through crises because man's relationships with his neighbor, the natural environment, and spirit forces have been broken. Man's task, if he is to be whole, is to renew and maintain harmonious relationships with (a) spiritual beings, (b) the natural environment, and (c) neighbors.[23]

The problem is that by and large the West Papuan church's worldview does not match the reality of West Papuans' daily life or worldview, and subsequently the church's offerings fail to meet the people on their own terms. This silence by the church on these issues is brought forward in the accounts of the spiritual healer as well as other missionaries in West Papua. While there are some churches, pastors, or priests who do acknowledge the *suanggi*'s role in West Papuan life, many of those who undergo spiritual suffering do not turn to the church for healing or counsel. There are many accounts of devout Christians attending church on Sunday morning and then turning to spirits as a source of healing or power on the same day.[24] William Longgar, former principal of the Christian Leaders' Training College of Papua New Guinea, writes that pragmatism and survival buttress this bifocal form of religiosity:

Institute for Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1977), 7–13, at 9.

[23] Tanebaum Center, "Toward a Zone of Peace," 419.

[24] It is of interest to note that largely, Melanesians resist syncretism (integrating tribal aspects into Christianity until it is no longer recognisable as Christianity), but rather let these different forms of religion operate simultaneously without incongruence or dissonance in their own understanding.

> Pragmatism or realism is the one trademark of traditional Melanesian spirituality, and is deeply embedded in the religious consciousness of the people. Rituals are performed for a variety of maladies, with concrete results expected instantly. If there are no results, rituals are changed until the right one that effects the result is discovered.[25]

When Christianity as preached in churches fails to meet the pragmatic and real needs of the people, Melanesians often turn towards other rituals or spiritualities until they find something that works.

If the problem is that the church does not speak of *suanggi*, it is easy to say the solution is simply for the church to address the phenomenon. But this is much easier said than done. West Papuan society is a complex structure of tribal beliefs and practices operating simultaneously with Christian beliefs and practices. Added to that complexity is the influence of modernity and globalisation. Australian academic Paul James writes that each of these asymmetrical modes of operation, understood as ontological categories or realities, overlap and are "always in tension with each other".[26] These layers—or perhaps better termed as Heideggerian horizons—culminate in a cumulative condition in which the West Papuan church, given its imported *a priori* assumptions about spirits, cannot speak to the experience of *suanggi* as a theological reality until it first addresses these presuppositions.

The real question is thus, how can the church speak *authentically* of and in the spiritual world of West Papuan culture? Missiologists—indeed even the missionaries to Melanesia—have long understood that one must take seriously the spirituality of West Papuan culture. But that has almost always been on the terms of a western post-enlightenment perspective. One cannot simply speak of spiritual activity as something that happens outside the church's reality. It is far too easy to dismiss spirits, sorcery, or witchcraft as a phenomenon only at work through psychosomatic cultural belief systems as many Christian theologians—even those who are Melanesian—are wont to do.[27] We must first listen to the lived experience and the spiritual realities

[25] Longgar, "Authenticating Melanesian Biblical Theology," 47.

[26] Paul James, "On Being Religious: Towards an Alternative Theory of Religion and Secularity," *The Occasional Papers, Institute for Culture and Society* 8/2 (2017), no pages. See also Paul James, Paul *Globalism, Nationalism, Tribalism: Bringing Theory Back In* (London: Sage, 2006).

[27] This line of reasoning can be seen in a recent article on sorcery and witchcraft in Papua New Guinea, Gabriel Kuman, "Sorcery, Witchcraft and Development in Papua New Guinea" *Pastoral & Socio-Cultural Journal for Melanesia* 41 (2009): 19–37, at 20: "The writer

as communicated by West Papuans. Then, and only then, we must work towards a way to authentically enter into the reality of *suanggi*, spirits, possession, and exorcism.

UN-TABOOING THE SPIRITUAL FORCES

Hiebert proposes a solution that moves theology towards a re-incorporation of the middle level of discourse into our conversations and understanding of the world:

> On the middle level, a holistic theology includes a theology of God in human history: in the affairs of nations, of peoples and of individuals. This must include a theology of divine guidance, provision and healing; of ancestors, spirits and invisible powers of this world; and of suffering, misfortune and death.[28]

This world of unseen, supernatural forces is in no way separate from that seen and perceived by the ordinary senses. Indeed, the case studies related by the spiritual healer and conversations with West Papuan refugees in Australia indicate that for many, spirits can be perceived not only by portents and signs in nature, but the spirits themselves actually can be seen and heard.

Exegetes have long noted the evergreen need to translate the New Testament worldview across *every other* worldview including our own. Whether western or indigenous West Papuan, we are always faced with the mandate to examine our own prejudices and biases when encountering the complex horizons of tribal beliefs, Christian traditions, and modernity that shape West Papuan culture. In the words of Aboriginal Australian theologian Garry Deverell, "The gospel is always already a translation of a translation of the eternal word uttered by the Father in Jesus Christ and animating the hearts, imaginations and cultural performances of human beings in every time and place."[29] In freeing the *kerygma* (the preaching of the gospel) from

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believes that people's own psychic and emotional reactions often lead to physical and emotional discomforts and misfortune due to the people's strong belief that such an evil force still exists and functions." In this vein, some argue that speaking of these dark spiritual forces only serves to fuel the fear that causes these psychosomatic maladies. While stoking fear is definitely a valid concern, ignoring the existing fear and spiritual realities is just another way of empowering the darkness (Luke 8:17; Eph 5:13).

[28] Hiebert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," 46.

[29] Garry Deverell, *Gondwana Theology: A Trawloolway Man Reflects on Christian Faith* (Reservoir: Morningstar Publishing, 2018), 30.

any singular or set of worldviews, the theological and pastoral concerns move away from a process that would systematise or rationalise away the experience of spirit activity in West Papua.

As we work to translate the gospel into this West Papuan context, we must remember first and foremost, that the gospel message is not an abstract-able principle. *Kergyma* is always incarnational, and thus grounded in the reality of the person of Christ. There is little benefit in claims such as "the kernel of the gospel is X" or the "true message behind the mythology of the New Testament is Y." The gospel, instead, is rooted in the incarnation of Christ. Jesus by his incarnation into a specific time, place, and culture gives licence to encounter spiritual phenomenon as reality. His earthly ministry consisted of casting out demons and healing the sick. Christ's earthly ministry was soteriological—not only in terms of saving one's soul from eternal damnation, but from the Greek root, σώζω (sṓzō) meaning to deliver, protect, or heal both figuratively and literally.[30] Bernard Narokobi writes, "I have no doubt that, had Christ been born into Melanesia, He would have come to fulfill, and make more perfect, the Melanesian religious experience."[31] To truly understand and live out the gospel in a West Papuan context, we must enter fully and incarnationally into the West Papuan world of spirits, *suanggi*, possession, and exorcisms that shape Melanesian culture.[32]

At this point, we must acknowledge a few of the many pitfalls that accompany any endeavor to integrate a world of spirits into our understanding of Christian theology. One such danger is placing Christ at the top of a spiritual pantheon, and making him merely the main god or entity worshipped among many. Hiebert warns against a second danger, "The church and mission must guard against Christianity itself becoming a new form of magic. Magic is based on a mechanistic view—a formula approach to reality that allows humans to control their own destiny."[33] This is already

[30] Daniel Thiagarajah and John Bottomley, *The Bones of the Righteous shall never be Broken: Finding God's Faithfulness in Dark Times* (Delhi: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2016), 124.

[31] Narakobi, "What is Religious Experience for a Melanesian?" 11.

[32] While noting an absence of theology and preaching addressing *suanggi*, it is important to acknowledge the vital and life-giving work that has been done by missiologists and Melanesian theologians on bringing the gospel into a Melanesian context. A full bibliography cannot be given here, but a wonderful starting point is the collection of essays in Longgar and Meadowcroft, *Living in the Family of Jesus*.

[33] Hiebert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," 46.

a danger in Melanesia, where the God of Christianity has been incorporated into a culture that sees spirits as commandable entities engaged to facilitate aims and ambitions, from helping crops to grow to striking down one's enemies. Theologian Joshua Damoi writes of this turn to a form of prosperity gospel, "Some people in Papua New Guinea have seen the idea of being a Christian as putting God under obligation. They attended church services, helped the minister, and carried out church activities, in order to put God under obligation."[34] In this transactional view of faith, one exchanges devotion, piety, or money for wealth, health, and happiness.[35]

Another potential pitfall is the over-romanticising of a pre-Christian culture, falling into the trap of fetishising the idea of a "noble savage." Garry Deverell writes poignantly of this danger:

> Any and all insistence about working from 'purely' Indigenous traditions—unpolluted by Western or Christian influences—is therefore not only naïve but also deeply disrespectful of Indigenous people. It fails to recognize that it is precisely our ability to adapt and respond to colonial perspectives, to absorb them creatively into our own, that has made the difference between our surviving and not surviving.[36]

In other words, we cannot turn back a historical dial and undo that which has been done in either Melanesia or in the scholarship of biblical studies and theology.[37]

Moving forward, as we can see, is no simple task. However, using the very tools of western theology, we can learn to dismantle our prejudices and *a priori* assumptions. Through the journey of incarnation, the lived experience of West Papuans invites us to expand our theological reality.

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[34] Joshua Daimoi, "Understanding Melanesians", *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 17/2 (2001): 6–22, at 15.

[35] A notable line of further inquiry would be on the way the West Papuan principle of reciprocity affects indigenous spirituality. In interpersonal and intertribal relations, the principle of reciprocity rather than transaction functions to keep peace by establishing a relationship rather than a mere exchange of goods.

[36] Deverell, *Gondwana Theology*, 41

[37] While the biblical cosmology may indeed be closer to a pre-Christian West Papuan cosmology, it is important to remember that, as James D. G. Dunn and Graham Twelftree, "Demon-possession and exorcism in the New Testament", *Churchman* 94 (1980): 210–225, at 222, point out, "the New Testament neither contains nor is interested in a fully worked out demonology."

What does theology that thus takes *suanggi*, spirits, possessions, and exorcisms seriously look like?

A Way Forward

In order to give flesh, so to speak, to this idea that theology must enter into and come out of the spiritual aspects of our world, we will examine one of the cases recorded by the spiritual healer. In this way, we begin a serious theological address of *suanggi* in West Papua that challenges the taboo imposed by western ideas of rationalism and determinism via twentieth-century Christianity.

First, a summary of the case.

This case from May 2018 involves an eighteen-year-old West Papuan woman who had recently graduated from high school, a member of the Gereja Kristen Injili (GKI), the largest Protestant denomination in West Papua.[38] On a visit to her aunt's house, she ran into the spiritual healer. The spiritual healer was a family friend and had known the young woman from previous visits. Sensing something was wrong from her demeanour, the healer instructed the young woman to enter a room that had been used for healing prayer. There, the healer, the young woman, her aunt, and her grandmother prayed for her for five hours. During this process, she experienced physical convulsions, crying, and emitted frightening vocal expressions. When the healing was complete and the *suanggi* had left her, she related that the previous night two *suanggi* had entered the locked house where she and her sister were staying alone at two o'clock in the morning. The *suanggi* had appeared as dark, black beings in the shape of men, and in a threatening way, forced her into a suicide pact. Earlier on the day that the exorcism was performed, she had prepared a poison to carry out the planned suicide that night. When the exorcism was complete, the spiritual healer instructed the young woman to stay close to her aunt, pray, study the Bible, and to continue to worship God. Through the relationship with the family, the spiritual healer has regularly followed up to ensure her continued wellbeing.

[38] Marcus Campbell, "Papua and West Papua," *Encyclopedia of Christianity in the Global South* (ed. Mark A. Lamport; Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 851–856.

For the scope of this paper, as an initial foray into the reality of the *suanggi* filled world of West Papuans, I want to focus on the uniquely Christian perspectives in this case.[39]

One framework for theological analysis asks the question: If God is present in all circumstances, where is God in this event? More specifically, how does this case reflect the incarnation of Christ and the continued irruption (apocalyptic in-breaking) of the kingdom of God into West Papua? How does the reality of what occurred in the West Papuan's life reflect the reality of the world and of the kingdom of God as reflected in Scripture?

One of the central themes of Jesus' message is that the kingdom of God has entered into our reality. Indeed, as Rowan Williams writes, "The Bible assumes, from beginning to end, that this material flesh is made to be inhabited and that the whole material world is made to be inhabited by the action of God."[40] Though our world is fractured, God does not sit distantly or idly while people suffer. God is in the deliverance and healing of those who are oppressed and sick, not only from a spiritual sickness in terms of eternal salvation, but God also affirms the goodness of human life in our everyday reality. The scriptural witness of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament affirm that God comes to give life and healing (Exod 23:35, Deut 32:39, Isa 57:18–19, John 10:10). When a young woman is delivered from the reality of *suanggi* attacks, through prayer, God is in the spiritual deliverance and in this affirmation of life. At the heart, this act of healing prayer is about affirming life. The act of expelling the *suanggi* is an action of restoration within the young woman. The suicidal impulse is cast out in the work of spiritual healing, restoring the affirmation that creaturely life belongs to God.[41]

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[39] That is not to say that the psychological, sociological, body-political, Foucauldian, feminist/womanist, and post-colonial questions, while notably western, are not vital to the painting of the full ethical picture. Those inter-disciplinary critiques and questions need to be raised, and I hope they will be raised in future studies. Similarly, while there is much to be gained in examining how stories of possession and healing relate to Melanesian culture, especially ideas of harmony, *mana*, authority, leadership, consensus, community, and kinship, those questions fall outside the scope of this paper.

[40] Rowan Williams, "The Theology of Faith and Healing," lecture delivered at Holy Rood House Centre for Health and Pastoral Care, Thirsk, 2003.

[41] This relates strongly to the undercurrent of Melanesian spirituality that affirms the sacredness of life or *mana*. See Daimoi, "Understanding Melanesians," 8.

Biblical scholar Paul Hollenbach connected demonic possession directly to colonial oppression: "Situations of social tension such as the following are often indicated as the causal context of possession: class antagonisms rooted in economic exploitation, conflicts between traditions where revered traditions are eroded, colonial domination and revolution."[42] Building on that thesis, New Testament scholar Cheryl Pero examines the Markan exorcism pericopes and concludes that the exorcisms performed by Jesus operate simultaneously and holistically at a dual level of spiritual and material redemption.[43] The Markan exorcisms are redemptive in that they involve the restoration of creation to the original state of wholeness and goodness. In this case, the exorcism speaks to the death-dealing spiritual reality attacking the young woman, and in engaging the powers of death in *suanggi*, the exorcism may also speak a word of resistance to the death-dealing political reality of the material oppression of Indonesia.

We must also affirm the belief that healing, whether spiritual or physical, is more than a mere demonstration of divine power addressing individual illness.[44] This act of exorcism brings eschatological hope into the present reality. The healing demonstrates that God is in control of the spiritual world through the casting out of the evil spirits and that God is in control of the physical world in preventing the young woman's death by suicide. In a world that may seem overrun by external forces—whether *suanggi*, Indonesian occupation, or familial dysfunction—God's kingdom is here on earth, and there is hope of restoration. This case of spiritual healing brings hope of restoration of relationship—right relationship to God, to fellow human, and to oneself.

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[42] Paul W. Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs, and Public Authorities: A socio-historical study," *JAAR* 49 (1982): 567–588, at 573. Hollenbach's thesis is that the Roman occupation of Palestine led to a psychosomatic mental health disorder resulting from commoners who resented their hopeless plight on the margins. While the phenomena of *suanggi* certainly predates the Indonesian occupation, one cannot view the phenomena in today's context without noting the background of military presence and human rights violations in West Papua.

[43] Cheryl Pero, *Liberation from Empire: Demonic Possession and Exorcism in the Gospel of Mark* (Studies in Biblical Literature, 150; New York: Peter Lang, Inc., 2013).

[44] We are reminded here of Jesus' assertion that his ministry is both material and spiritual in the synoptic accounts of the healing of the paralytic at Capernaum. (Matt 9:4, Mark 2:9, Luke 5:23)

A fundamental Christian truth is that our human experience is reformulated and re-envisioned through faith. Christianity, as proclaimed in the scriptural witness from both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, informs how we reflect on stories of *suanggi* like the story above. The active agents at work in the story are the *suanggi*, the healing team, God, and the young woman experiencing spiritual attack. The *suanggi*, much like the demons in the New Testament, work against goodness, life, and thus work against God. The demons or spirits are not powerless, but they are rendered powerless when confronted with the power of the Holy Spirit. The healing team works to fulfill the *missio Dei* as they understand it: to bring life, healing, and casting out of evil spirits (Mark 6:7–13). It is always a step of faith, and not of command, when the healing team petitions God for deliverance and healing. God is at work in and through this entire ordeal, not as one under obligation, but as the God who has come to give abundant life.

The young woman who experienced the healing is also not without agency. We must be very careful in reflection by resisting that very human urge to explain the "why" of the spiritual attack upon this young woman. As Jesus said in John's gospel, the cause of sickness or suffering is not necessarily directly correlated to any wrongdoing or sin. Her role in this story is joining in prayer with the healing team and taking that step towards God and towards life in allowing the healing team to pray for her deliverance from the *suanggi*. Perhaps just as important to the story are the unmentioned agents, such as the rest of the family, the community, the pastors, and the church. The role they did or did not play in this dramatic battle against the demonic is important to acknowledge and a place for further investigation. In this sense, we must note that the spiritual healing and oppression takes place in a complex socio-political-relational-cultural nexus. The church's work is not only spiritual and must confront trauma both materially and spiritually.

This act of exorcism reinforces the principles that God is the giver of life, and that God is at work in the reality of our world both spiritually and materially. All humans and spirits are agents in the drama that unfolds in history. This drama is witnessed by the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and continues to unfold today. We live in the already and the not yet—living in the tension of a world radically broken and yet radically redeemed. With the person and work of Christ the kingdom of God broke into this world. It

is an act of faith that we enter into the reality of the world—*suanggi* included—proclaiming God's kingdom and the life that God brings.

CONCLUSION

To summarise where we have come thus far: we identified the problem of the excluded middle; we posited a solution of dismantling our own worldview's biases and presuppositions in order to enter into the reality of another; we heard one account of spiritual attack and deliverance and then reflected on the theological implications of acknowledging this compounded cultural reality.

There are countless pages to be filled with further description and analysis. Before concluding, I want to offer a non-exhaustive list of issues that this paper could not directly address but are likely connected to the spiritual phenomena of *suanggi* in West Papua. Hans Austnaberg, whose dissertation described exorcisms in Madagascar, poses the question, "Is exorcism only a cultural expression of certain needs or does it reflect a transcendent reality?"[45] In that vein, I believe there is much to be uncovered in following Hollenbach's thesis that imperial occupation correlates with symptoms of spiritual oppression. What are the psychological and spiritual implications of living under occupation? What spiritual trauma may be inflicted by dark spiritual powers exacerbating physical and psychological trauma, and how can the church and an emerging nation address it? Along similar lines, there have been recent reports of spiritually assisted hypnosis as an effective way of addressing trauma, which are comparable to some descriptions of healing prayer.[46] There is also more to uncover through sociological engagement of the phenomenon, examining socio-economic status, family dynamics, and education. A further line of enquiry would be to compare how the work of the *dukun*, the local spiritual guides and healers, correlates and critiques these stories of a westerner performing exorcism.

This story of *suanggi* attack and of subsequent deliverance is a message not just for West Papua, but for all of Christendom: God affirms life; God

[45] Hans Austnaberg, *Shepherds and Demons: A Study of Exorcism as Practised by and Understood by Shepherds in the Malagasy Lutheran Church* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008) 6.

[46] C. B. J. Lesmana, L. K. Suryani, G. D. Jensen, and N. Tiliopoulos, "A Spiritual-Hypnosis Assisted Treatment of Children with PTSD after the 2002 Bali Terrorist Attack," *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis* 52 (2009): 23–34.

affirms the redemption and restoration of a good creation; and we must hold to hope in faith that even in the depths of despair God will redeem all things—*suanggi* included. American poet Christian Wiman once said that the goal of poetry is to "add to the stock of available reality."[47] I hope that this engagement with the realities of the phenomenon of *suanggi* in West Papua has in some measure added to our collective stock of available theological reality.

[47] Christian Wiman, "How Does One Remember God?" *On Being*, broadcast interview of Christian Wiman by Krista Tippett, 2012.