

MANA FROM HEAVEN?
A THEOLOGY OF RELATIONAL POWER IN THE
CONTEXT OF THE MURDER OF SEVEN MELANESIAN
BROTHERS IN SOLOMON ISLANDS

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Abstract

The murder of seven members of the Melanesian Brotherhood (2003) has raised questions over the nature of *mana* (power) operating in the Brotherhood. In response to those questions, my aim is to explore the Melanesian concept of *mana* and how in the interaction between a received Christianity and existing Melanesian worldviews, a theology of *mana* has developed. This is reliant as much on versions of European Christianity as Melanesian worldviews and exists in tension with concepts of powerlessness and vulnerability.

My research crucially revolves around how my experience of the murders involves an interaction between theological contexts and identities and produces theological reflection out of a synthesis between them. This experience has an intensity that shapes and informs the theological reflection that develops which is neither purely “British/European” nor purely “Melanesian”. Rather it exists at that intersection between them which makes connections and allows a conversation. The aim is to make connections between Melanesian theologies of power and European theologies of power and to allow contextual theology to develop from a conversation between concepts of relational power in European theological traditions and existing concepts of relational power in Melanesia. The theology of relational power that develops from such a theological synthesis can then address the theological tension in the Melanesian Brotherhood, Melanesian theology and beyond.

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Introduction

In 2003, seven members of the Melanesian Brotherhood, an Anglican Religious Order of young men, were murdered on the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal in Solomon Islands. This research has evolved out of an experience of those deaths, their aftermath and the theological questions and uncertainty they provoked.

From 1999-2003 I lived and worked in Solomon Islands, teaching theology at Bishop Patteson Theological College on the island of Guadalcanal. It was in this period that I witnessed, and in some limited ways experienced, the conflict that broke out when a local militia group drove settlers from the nearby island of Malaita off Guadalcanal land, an incident which escalated into a conflict between two rival militia groups. This thesis has evolved not only from those experiences but also from the experience of teaching and listening to students in the classroom, and from my encounter and association with the Melanesian Brotherhood.

I came to know members of the Brotherhood initially simply by location. Their headquarters at Tabalia is literally next door to the theological college and a number of Brothers were students at the college. I learned of the various theological struggles and difficulties that they were wrestling with simply by listening to their stories and that of their chaplain, Fr Richard Carter, an expatriate and a good friend with a fifteen year association with the Brotherhood and who would later become a Brother himself. Questions about *mana*, power, status and motivation for joining both the Brotherhood and the Priesthood in the Church of Melanesia were implicit in many of the stories I heard and evident in the attitudes of people towards both Brothers and Priests. The issue of motivation for candidates to the Priesthood, for example, as a way of acquiring *mana*, alluded to in the work of missionary anthropologist Darrell Whiteman, appeared evident not only in the various college meetings of which I was a part and where we discussed criteria for selection, but also in the many candidate exam papers that I had to mark. Usually there would be a question about why a candidate wanted to be considered for ordination and some of those answers clearly seemed to support Whiteman's findings.¹

¹ Darrell Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 337-338.

Yet these issues would become more explicit with the work of the Melanesian Brotherhood as peacemakers during the conflict and the various stories of the miracles they were believed to have performed. Fear, too, was a prominent factor. For example, on one particular occasion, a drunken militant stopped the Brotherhood's truck upon which I was travelling. Once he realized, however, whose truck it was and had seen the Brothers inside, he very quickly retreated muttering hasty apologies. It was obvious that even in a drunken state, he knew the significance of the Brothers and quickly got out of their way. It is these kinds of observations and experiences, coupled with the great sense of shock and theological questioning that occurred after the murder of the seven Brothers, which inspired me to write and articulate what I saw unfolding around me. It was a story that needed to be told.

My Role in Doing this Theology

The question of whether I have the right to tell that story is another matter and the answer lies in what boundaries I set in doing so. I have undertaken this research as an expatriate looking into a culture very different from my own and therefore I have had to accept the limitations of such an exercise. I am not Melanesian and although the theology that I develop is, like all theology, a response to a particular context, it is still written by a non-Melanesian working in a Melanesian context. Consequently, as Bevans suggests, it must always be critiqued based on an outsider not fully knowing how Melanesians feel or perceive reality.² Yet, such an exercise can help Melanesian theologians at least to grapple with and to articulate responses to the issues I raise. The support and encouragement that I have received from my Melanesian friends and colleagues only serve to confirm that this thesis will be of value to the ongoing task of articulating and constructing valid theologies which reflect the context and concerns of Melanesians.

My contribution, then, is not so much “solving” the theological problem or tension that I raise, nor an attempt to argue that I know more than Melanesians do, but rather it is an attempt to develop a theology which is culturally and socially relevant to the context and one that develops from a synthesis between Melanesian and European theologies of

² Stephen B Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Revised and Expanded Edition*, Second ed. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 19.

power. This is undertaken because the theological problem that I identify is not sufficiently dealt with in the literature of Melanesian theology, simply because it is not a fully developed or systematic theology. It is rather a collection of fragmented theologies under construction across Melanesia which often deal either with suggestions of how to develop Melanesian theology or with the immediate concerns of a specific culture from within Melanesia.

My theological reflection begins with a specific tension which I identify in the context of the murder of seven Melanesian Brothers. In order to engage with this tension, I look beyond Melanesia to non-Melanesian theologies which may, in conversation with Melanesian theology, help to explain the existing tension and suggest ways forward in dealing with it. My contribution to this comes in what I can bring to the dialogue. In other words, I am able to weave theology developed in my own culture into the existing theologies being developed in Melanesia to engage with an existing tension that finds expression in Melanesia and explicitly within the Melanesian Brotherhood. Yet such an undertaking is not without difficulties or dangers. Charles Forman in his overview of theology in the Pacific Islands makes the following observation:

Along with Western culture, Western theology comes in for its share of criticism. It is common to argue that Western theology is relevant only to Western conditions. To try to apply it to the Pacific is to engage in theological imperialism. Theology must be formulated for each time and place, and the would-be universal theologies from the West are ineffective for Oceanians”.³

This statement is a valid one if we continue to accept that theologies developed elsewhere are universal and can be applied universally to all contexts. Contextual theology arose precisely because such theology did not address the issues of people living in those different contexts. So, as Schreiter suggests, such theologies were far from universal and instead were simply contextual theologies that “extended the results of their reflections beyond their own contexts to other settings, usually without an awareness of the rootedness of their theologies within their own contexts”.⁴ Consequently, as Tofaeono argues, much of the “universal” theology introduced to the

³ Charles W Forman, "Finding Our Own Voice: The Reinterpreting of Christianity by Oceanian Theologians," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 29, no. 3 (2005): 120.

⁴ Robert J Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local*, Faith and Cultures Series (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 2.

Pacific was in reality a Eurocentric contextual theology that had very little relevance to the pressing issues of local context in Melanesia or anywhere else.⁵

Yet, for Schreiter, theology does have a kind of universalising function because it needs to be able to speak beyond its own context and hear voices from beyond itself.⁶ Theology cannot simply be reduced to a particular context because then it simply becomes a product of its own surroundings and unable to critique the very context from which it has emerged. The relationship of theology to context must always be one of intimacy and distance. It must be rooted in the context yet also be able to critique and move beyond it. As Schreiter claims, universalising is not totalising. It is not the suppression of difference or the claim to be mutually exclusive. Rather, theology must not be restricted to its own context simply because, “if the message of what God has done in Christ is indeed Good News for all peoples, then the occurrence of grace in any setting has relevance for the rest of humanity”.⁷

In essence then, I am following Schreiter in recognizing the benefits of inter-theological and contextual dialogue. My experience of being taught in a British/European theological context allows me to bring some of that theology into conversation with existing Melanesian theology. This is, however, not a question of superiority or Eurocentric imperialism. The non-Melanesian theologies that I use are chosen on the basis of their suitability in conversing with existing or similar concepts in Melanesia and which make sense in a Melanesian context. If theology does need to move beyond its own context and hear voices from beyond then non-Melanesian theologies of power should be able to speak in the Melanesian context and vice versa. The non-Melanesian theologies of power I use for theological reflection in Melanesia are able to enrich Melanesian theology just as much as Melanesian theology is able to enrich non-Melanesian.

At the beginning of his paper at the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools Sub-Regional Workshop in Tonga, Sandy Yule made the following point:

⁵ Ama 'amalele Tofaeono, "Editorial," *Pacific Journal of Theology* 2, no. 27 (2002): 1.

⁶ Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local*, 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 4. See also Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology: Revised and Expanded Edition*, 14-15.

In the matter of context, I prefer to say that I sit in two contexts rather than that I am between two contexts. I am not leaving my Australian context behind by coming to work in Tonga. I am all too aware of the countless ways in which I bring my Australian cultural identity and experience with me. It is also true that I am not seeking to cease being Australian and working at becoming Tongan, were that possible. I therefore prefer to say that I present these reflections as an Australian who has been privileged to teach Theology in Tonga for over five years and who has been immeasurably enriched by the experience.⁸

Yule's words reflect my own experience. His recognition of how cultural identity impinges upon his own teaching in Tonga is a crucial point. All theologians, whether they recognize it or not, are deeply influenced by their own cultural context and experience and I am no different. I bring to this thesis my own British cultural identity and experience and in the doing of theology in Melanesia I am not seeking to become Melanesian either. Instead I am taking up a theological problem made explicit in the very real stories of the Melanesian Brotherhood and in some limited way am seeking to offer a way forward in addressing it.

The Contextual Theology Debate

The task and development of contextual theology is a vast one and although there is almost universal agreement that it needs to be done, there is less agreement on how it should be done. Consequently there are a large number of various methods and models identified and developed by contextual theologians. Cortez, in a survey of the contextual theology debate, notes that all of these revolve around a bipolar tension between the biblical message and the cultural situation and, while most theologians accept the contextual nature of theology, there is considerable difference on how theological contextuality should be understood.⁹ He identifies various "bipolar" characterizations that are grouped around this theological tension using Hordern's distinction between "transformers" and "translators" in theology as a starting point. In a work pre-dating most of the contextual theology debate and in response to "death of

⁸ Sandy Yule, "What Is Contextual Theology," *Pacific Journal of Theology* 2, no. 29 (2003): 11.

⁹ Marc Cortez, "Context and Concept: Contextual Theology and the Nature of Theological Discourse," *Westminster Theological Journal* 67 (2005): 85.

God” theology, Hordern identifies two specific theological trends that recognize the need for dialogue in the world and the need to engage with it.¹⁰

Translators focus on expressing the universal content of the Gospel in a way that is intelligible in the theologian’s situation. A translation in this sense implies that, “although we are speaking in a different language, we are still saying the same thing”.¹¹

A *transformer*, on the other hand, implies some form of drastic change.¹² Cortez argues that, “transformers are willing to adjust both the form and the content of the Christian faith based on the needs and ideas of the contemporary situation”.¹³ It is these two positions, Cortez argues, that have come to reflect the bipolar extremes of contextual theology and have been identified by theologians who use different terminologies across contexts to express it. So, for example, we have *existential* contextualisation versus *dogmatic* contextualisation, *creation-centred* versus *redemption-centred* theologies and *traditionalists* versus *reformists*. Both positions however, reflect the extreme ends of the debate and theologians may introduce a tripolar framework, or more, in order to allow for mediating positions that attempt to balance the two poles in some way. So for example Hesselgrave and Rommen develop *apostolic*, *prophetic* and *syncretistic* positions, Schreiter *translation*, *adaptation* and *contextual* models, and Pinnock *conservative*, *moderate* and *progressive*.¹⁴ Cortez himself prefers to talk in terms of *translation*, *praxis* and *synthetic* models. Bevans, on the other hand, goes even further and develops six models of contextual theology that seek to cover the entire range of theological positions across the poles. These are *translation*, *anthropological*, *praxis*, *synthetic*, *transcendental* and *countercultural*. My theological reflection in Melanesia relies, to some extent, on four of these models which are as follows:

¹⁰ William Hordern, *New Directions in Theology Today*, vol. 1 Introduction, New Directions in Theology Today (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), 141.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Cortez, "Context and Concept: Contextual Theology and the Nature of Theological Discourse," 87.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

1. The Translation Model

This model focuses on “articulating the unchanging truths of the Bible in a culturally intelligible manner for a given cultural context”.¹⁵ While, as Bevans argues, every model of contextual theology is a model of translation in the sense of there always being a content to be adapted to a particular culture, the translation model insists on the Gospel message being unchanging.¹⁶ In addition, the values and thought forms of culture are understood not so much as being good in themselves but rather as convenient vehicles for the unchanging and universal Gospel truth. The translation model presupposes that there is a supracultural or supracontextual essence to the Gospel that is applicable to all cultures and contexts, although there is disagreement over what that essence may actually be. This is also the most common model used by expatriates in their attempts to adapt church tradition to a local culture.¹⁷

2. The Anthropological Model

This model starts at the opposite end of the spectrum and is concerned primarily with, “the establishment or preservation of cultural identity by a person of Christian faith”.¹⁸ The model starts with cultural identity and is “anthropological” because on the one hand it focuses on the *anthropos* of the human person and the good and worth of the persons’ identity and on the other it makes use of the insights of anthropology as a social science. Advocates of this model will work from a *creation-centred* rather than *redemption-centred* theology. In other words, a theology which values human experience and context as essentially good and one that sees the world as sacramental, where God continually reveals himself in daily life and to ordinary people.¹⁹ By implication, then, human experience and culture are centres of God’s activity and therefore sources of theology.²⁰ This is a model used by theologians doing theology in Melanesia, a prominent example being Ennio Mantovani whose work is crucial to this thesis,

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Revised and Expanded Edition*, 37.

¹⁷ Robert J Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985), 7; Leonardo N Mercado, "A Proposal for Constructing Melanesian Theology," *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 3, no. 2 (1987): 72.

¹⁸ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Revised and Expanded Edition*, 54.

¹⁹ Ibid., 21.

²⁰ Ibid; Neville Bartle, *Death, Witchcraft and the Spirit World in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea*, Point Series No 29 (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 2005), 100-101.

particularly his work on the biocosmic nature of Melanesian religions and his use of the dema myth of Papua New Guinea as a theological source.²¹

3. The Praxis Model

This model is concerned primarily with the identity of Christians in a context of social change. Its focus is not on knowledge about faith but rather on commitment to positive action to bring about change in society.²² In this model, theology is not done simply by providing relevant expressions of Christian faith but also by commitment to Christian action.²³ It involves the process of “right acting” as well as simply “right thinking”. Such a model emphasizes concepts of liberation and transformation in society and maintains that these can be brought about through theological praxis, that is action with reflection. Liberation theology remains a prominent example of this kind of theological reflection.

4. The Synthetic Model

Bevans describes this as the middle of the road model as it attempts to balance the three approaches we have described above. Essentially at the heart of this model is the need for constant dialogue as it attempts to hold Gospel, culture, tradition and culture change together in a creative tension. It recognizes the importance of each and then tries to utilise them for the development of a contextual theology. As Bevans notes:

It tries to preserve the importance of the gospel message and the heritage of traditional doctrinal formulations while at the same time acknowledging the vital role that context has played and can play in theology, even to the setting of the theological agenda.²⁴

Key to this approach is the presupposition that every context has elements of uniqueness and elements that are held in common with others. Such an approach will make use of insights from other contexts, cultures, experiences and ways of thinking simply because

²¹ Bartle, *Death, Witchcraft and the Spirit World in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea*, 101.

²² Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Revised and Expanded Edition*, 70; Bartle, *Death, Witchcraft and the Spirit World in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea*, 101.

²³ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Revised and Expanded Edition*, 72.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

all of these have something to say not only to the specific culture in which they are developed but also beyond to others. Here there is the potential and possibility for a mutual enrichment when contexts can dialogue with each other. The participants of one context can have something positive to give to the participants of another and each context can benefit from the insights of the others. As Bevans writes, “Attention to one’s own context can perhaps discover values in other contexts that had never been noticed before, and attention to others (including the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures), can transform and enrich one’s own worldview”.²⁵

Methodology

My theological method and reflection makes use of Bevans’ models, outlined above, primarily the *anthropological* and *synthetic* models respectively. For example, I begin from an event in a specific cultural context and use human experience and culture as theological sources as in the *anthropological* model, while also developing a theological synthesis that makes use of other contexts, cultures and experiences as per the *synthetic* model. However these theoretical models do not necessarily take account of the complex interactions and nuances between theological and cultural contexts in practice.

While they are helpful in providing some framework for theological reflection, such models as fixed categories struggle to take account of contextual theology in which such categories are fluid and often interconnect, interact and blur into each other.

My thesis began with an experience of an event in a Melanesian context and my initial writing and research focused on the work of social anthropologists who give insights into Melanesian cultural concepts, the key issue of *mana* and how it operates in Melanesian societies. Of particular interest were their interpretations of the interaction between “traditional” Melanesian culture and Christian traditions coming into Melanesia. I then worked on an historical study focused on the Melanesian Brotherhood, its formation, the reasons for its formation and the Brotherhood’s association with *mana* and then an historical overview of the conflict in Solomon Islands, the role of the Melanesian Brotherhood as peacemakers, their association with *mana* in this context and the murder of the seven Brothers.

²⁵ Ibid., 91.

Once I had completed both socio-anthropological and historical research, I undertook field-research in Solomon Islands for one month in mid-2005 where I interviewed twenty informants including senior Church leaders and clergy of the Church of Melanesia, members of the Melanesian Brotherhood, parishioners, members of other church denominations and leaders in the peace and disarmament programme. This was followed by another five interviews in Auckland, between June and August 2005. These were semi-structured interviews in which I was interested to hear people's views and interpretations of the Brotherhood, the murder of the seven Brothers and the issue of *mana* connected to them. The data collected from these interviews formed the basis for developing and articulating the theological problem that I identify.

These responses also helped me to focus the research to a particular area. Initially I was intending to develop some kind of theology of reconciliation but the data collected enabled a sharpening of focus to the use, abuse and motivation for using *mana* in the Brotherhood. My response was to develop a theology of relational power to deal directly with issues of power in the murder of the seven Brothers and the Brotherhood Community dealing with its aftermath.

After collecting and transcribing the data I was able to focus on theological research, the prime focus of the thesis, and after articulating the theological problem alluded to in the field-research I explored Melanesian theology primarily to discover concepts to address that problem or issue. This brought to light complex issues in Melanesian theology, regarding its origins, the impact of expatriates on its development, and the role of diverse cultural, social and denominational contexts in all of this. I then moved to an analysis of European theologies of power, selecting concepts of relational power that develop through process and feminist theology, concepts of power in liberation theology and notions of divine powerlessness, with a view to making connections to concepts of power in Melanesian theology.

The final stage of the research is a theological synthesis which brings together elements of my experience of the event, that of my own British theological context and contexts operating in Melanesian theology. The theological reflection coming out of this synthesis stands at the intersection between Melanesian and European theologies of power that allows for conversation and connections to be made between them. The

result is a theology of relational power which is both inter-contextual and inter-cultural that has implications for not only Melanesian theology, and more specifically the Melanesian Brotherhood, but also issues of power in European theologies and contexts.

Thesis Structure

The thesis is effectively split into three main parts which reflects its methodological development: The first part “Melanesian Context” is designed to give an overview of the context within which I am working. Chapter one gives an overview of Solomon Island cultures and context and introduces key Melanesian concepts that are important for understanding *mana* and how it operates in Melanesian worldviews. Chapter two gives an overview of the *mana* concept and how it operates in cultures across Solomon Islands concluding with a section on how it has been incorporated into local forms of Christianity. Both chapters draw upon anthropological sources from anthropologists or mission anthropologists working from specific cultures across Melanesia.

The second section is largely historical: chapter three focuses on the history and development of the Melanesian Brotherhood from their beginnings in 1925 to the present day; chapter four deals with the underlying causes and events of the recent conflict in Solomon Islands with a specific section on the work of the Melanesian Brotherhood as peacemakers and the murder of the seven Brothers in 2003.

The third section is theological and comprises the final four chapters of the thesis. Chapter five defines and articulates the theological tension at the heart of this thesis, made explicit in the murder of the Brothers. Chapter six gives an overview of Melanesian theology, its major themes and an assessment of its treatment of *mana*. Chapter seven is an analysis of concepts of power in European theology, with a view to making connections to concepts of power in Melanesian theology. Chapter eight is a theological synthesis where once connections are made, a theology of relational power is developed to address theological tensions in the Melanesian Brotherhood and beyond.

Chapter 1

Solomon Islands People and Cultures: An Overview

This chapter is an overview of Solomon Islands cultures and context which is necessary to understand the role of *mana* within Melanesian worldviews. I identify key Melanesian concepts in order to show how they interact with each other and with the key concept of *mana* discussed in chapter two. Although I draw on sources across Melanesia, Mantovani's identification of key Melanesian concepts in Papua New Guinea being an example, my study is focused on Solomon Islands. Any outside sources are used purely to identify similarities or affinities with the Solomon Island context.

I focus on this particular context for two main reasons: First, despite some commonalities between cultures across Melanesia, the immense cultural diversity of the region, and even within Solomon Islands itself, makes it practicable to restrict my study to Solomon Islands' context. Despite such focus, any identification of similarities or affinities across Solomon Islands cultures means making some generalizations that may or may not apply to every culture. Nevertheless, the commonalities I do identify apply to a significant number of cultures within the context and may also apply to other parts of Melanesia.

Secondly, my focus on Solomon Islands is also a question of experience. It is the context that I have lived and worked in, giving me some familiarity with the concepts that I identify. This experience does not extend to other countries in Melanesia and so I am less familiar with issues specific to those particular contexts.

1. Location and Environment

Solomon Islands forms part of the Melanesian region of the South Pacific, "*Melanesia*" a Greek term meaning "the black islands" was given to the region by the French explorer d'Urville, presumably because the people he encountered there were darker in

colour than the Polynesians of the eastern Pacific.¹ Melanesia is a vast region stretching from eastern Papua New Guinea in a south-eastern direction to the Fiji Islands and comprises not only those countries but also Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and the French territory of New Caledonia.

Solomon Islands consists of a chain of seven main islands, Choiseul, New Georgia, Santa Isabel, Guadalcanal, Malaita, Makira and Santa Cruz to the east, along with over two hundred small islands stretching over 1,600 kilometres and 1.34 million square kilometres of sea. It's location in the South Pacific is between 5 and 12 degrees south latitude and 155 and 170 degrees east longitude, that runs roughly parallel to the North East coast of Australia with an overall land mass of around 28,000 square kilometres.² The islands "range from large rugged mountainous forest covered with primary rainforest to small sand and coralline atolls" which are tropical in climate and stretch across a volcanic zone.³ There are according to Kent, thirty-four recognisable volcanic centres in Solomon Islands including active volcanoes on Savo, Tenakula and Simbo islands.⁴ Many of the islands are rich in natural resources including forestry, fisheries and minerals. It has not only a natural forest area of around 2.4 million hectares (about 80% of the overall land mass) but also a vast sea area that supports the subsistence livelihoods of the majority of Solomon Islanders.⁵

In terms of population, the 1999 census put the total population at 409,042 with a growth rate of 2.8%, one of the highest in the world. The majority of people live in rural areas (around 84%) with a minority living in urban areas. Almost 50,000 people live in the country's capital Honiara located on the largest island of Guadalcanal.⁶

¹ Walter G Ivens, "The Islands of Melanesia," in *The Church in Melanesia*, ed. Stuart W Artless (London: The Melanesian Mission, n.d); Charles Elliot Fox, *The Story of the Solomons* (Taroaniara: Diocese of Melanesia, 1967), 154. Although Kent suggests that the term may have been used to describe either the lowering storm clouds sometimes seen over the islands or from the effect of the dark vegetation on the hillsides. See Janet Kent, *The Solomon Islands* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1972), 15.

² B Thistlethwaite and D Davies, "A Sustainable Future for Melanesia? Natural Resources, Population and Development," *Pacific Policy Paper*, no. 17 (1996). Cited in Tony Hou, "People of Solomon Islands: From the Past to the Present," in *Solomon Islands Human Development Report 2002: Building a Nation Volume 2*, ed. Mark Otter (Windsor, Queensland: Government of Solomon Islands, 2002), 13.

³ T Leary, "Solomon Islands: State of the Environment Report," (Apia: SPREP, 1993). Cited in Hou, "People of Solomon Islands: From the Past to the Present," 13.

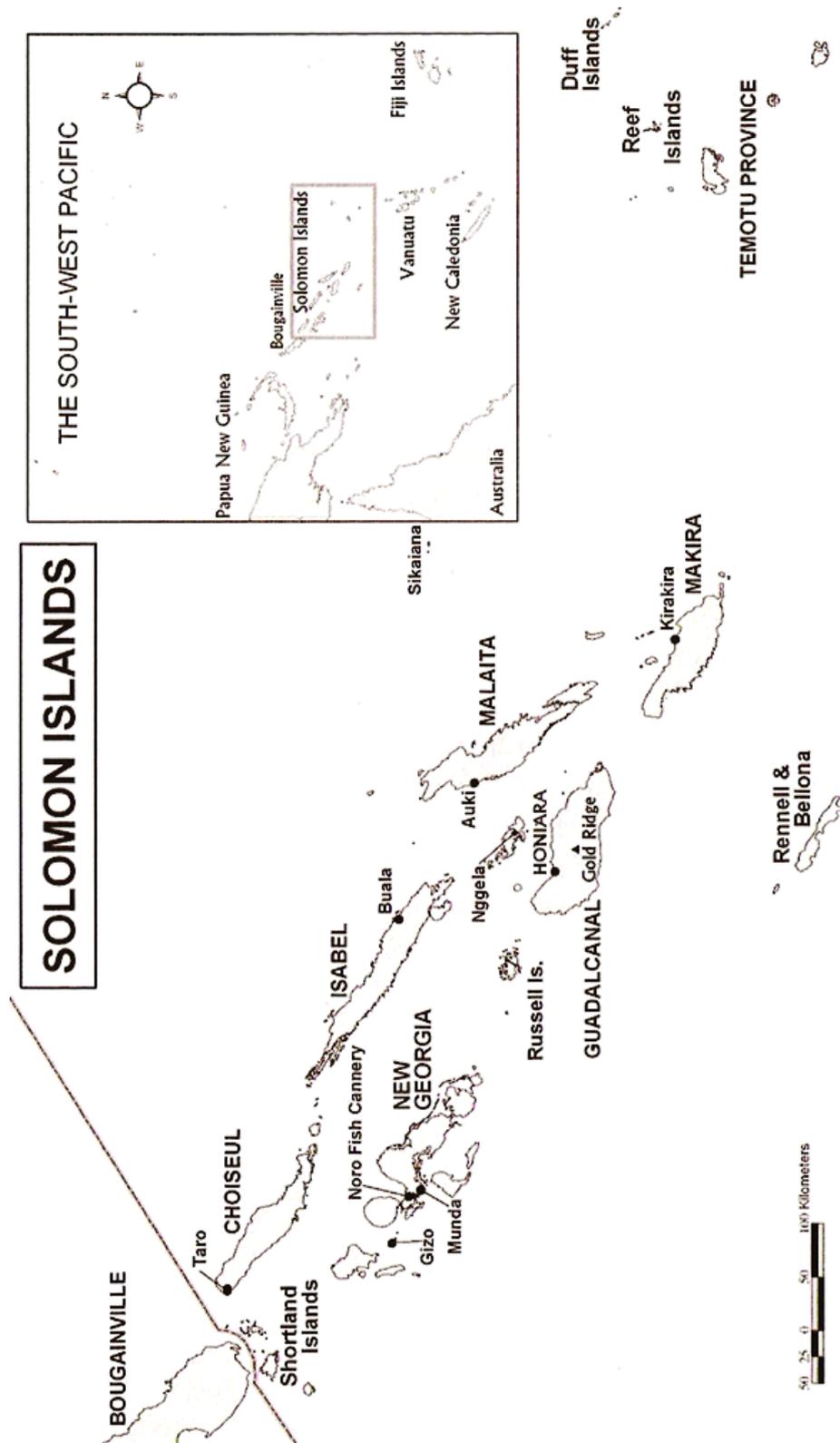
⁴ Kent, *The Solomon Islands*, 16.

⁵ Hou, "People of Solomon Islands: From the Past to the Present," 14.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 11-13; Ron Crocombe, *The South Pacific* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 2001), 703.

Crocombe puts the total population based on a year 2000 estimate at 446,000 with a population growth rate of 3.4%. The population of Honiara is likely to have changed dramatically over recent years, due to

Map of Solomon Islands⁷



the exodus of people back to their home islands during the recent conflict and their subsequent return after the restoration of peace.

⁷ Reproduced from Jon Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2004), 25.

1.1 People

The majority of the population are Melanesians (386,745) with Polynesians making up a large minority (12,257) and it is believed that the ancestors of both groups may have migrated to the islands from South East Asia.⁸ Melanesians occupy the majority of the islands while the Polynesians settled, and continue to live on, outlying atolls such as Ontong Java (also known as Lord Howe) and Sikaiana.

Physically Melanesians vary considerably from island to island, so much so that it is possible to tell where Solomon Islanders come from by their appearance.⁹ For example, those from the Western Solomons (Shortland Islands, Choiseul and New Georgia) tend to be much darker in colour while others from Malaita, for example, can be dark brown or light brown in colour. Others can, in Coombe's words, have, "the sallow complexion of a Southern European."¹⁰ Melanesians can also be dark brown in colour with black hair, but also light brown with blond to auburn hair, all of which can indicate the origins or home island of the Melanesian in question.¹¹

1.2 Cultural Diversity

Along with the considerable physical variations comes an immense diversity of cultures not only from island to island but also between island regions and even between local villages within a region. Solomon Islands culture is not homogeneous; there are significant differences of structure, beliefs and practices from region to region.¹² The name "Solomon Islands" is an artificial term given to the region by Europeans. It is, rather, a group of islands with very different, fluid and fragmented socio-political and cultural systems to the extent that one could argue that Solomon Islands has never really

⁸ See for example Hou, "People of Solomon Islands: From the Past to the Present," 14; Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 43-44; Paul Sillitoe, *An Introduction to the Anthropology of Melanesia: Culture and Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 12-14; Fox, *The Story of the Solomons*, 85-87; Charles Elliot Fox, *Kakamora* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1962), 154-158; Douglas L Oliver, *The Pacific Islands: Revised Edition* (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1961), 37-63.

⁹ See for example Ian MacNeil, *Sweet Horizons: A History of the Solomon Islands* (St Kilda West: Acland Press, 2000), 2.

¹⁰ Florence Coombe, *Islands of Enchantment: Many-Sided Melanesia* (London: Macmillan And Co Limited, 1911), xxiii.

¹¹ *Lukim Solomone: Introducing the Solomon Islands*, (Honiara: Information and Broadcasting, 1973), 18.

¹² Hou, "People of Solomon Islands: From the Past to the Present," 14.

existed as one country at all despite political independence in 1978 and numerous attempts to foster a sense of national consciousness.¹³ Kent, writing in 1972, observed that many islanders identify primarily with their own ethnic, social and cultural groups, to the extent that being from Malaita, Tikopia, Reef Islands, Isabel and so on, took precedence over any sense of being a Solomon Islander. These differences were maintained wherever islanders congregated, whether in the capital, schools, plantations or other places of employment. Inter-island rivalries also existed between groups and fights between them were not unknown.¹⁴

1.3 Language

Alongside the multiplicity of cultures there exists a multiplicity of languages. According to Tyron and Hackman, there are 64 different languages spoken in Solomon Islands.¹⁵ This is significant because islands and island regions were separated not only by geography and cultures but also by language. It is common for one village to speak a certain language and the nearest one quite another. There has, however, developed a common language known as “Solomon Islands Pijin” used between people of different languages. According to Fox it was first spoken by Malaitan men and others on the sugar plantations of Queensland, while MacNeil describes it as a “trade jargon” used by

¹³ Cliff Bird, "The Anatomy of the Crisis in Solomon Islands from a Theological Perspective," *Pacific Journal of Theology* 2, no. 25 (2001): 56-57. The name “Solomon Islands” was given to the region by Spanish explorer Alvado de Mendana de Neyra who named it after the Biblical land of Ophir believed to be the source of King Solomon’s gold.

¹⁴ Kent, *The Solomon Islands*, 27. A former Prime Minister of Solomon Islands Solomon Mamaloni once commented that: “Solomon Islands or the Solomon Islands Community has never been a nation and will never be a nation and will never become one.” This is cited in Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka, *Beyond Ethnicity: The Political Economy of the Guadalcanal Crisis in Solomon Islands*, State Society and Governance in Melanesia Project Working Paper (Canberra: The Australian National University, 2001), 13. Although Jourdan argues that there is a new sense of national consciousness amongst the younger generation particularly in the urban centres. See Christine Jourdan, "Stepping-Stones to National Consciousness: The Solomon Islands Case," in *Globalization and Culture Change in the Pacific Islands*, ed. Victoria S Lockwood (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education, 2004), 102-115; Bird, "The Anatomy of the Crisis in Solomon Islands from a Theological Perspective," 115.

¹⁵ D T Tryon and B D Hackman, *Solomon Islands Languages: An Internal Classification* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1983). This is a matter of some discussion due to the difficulty of distinguishing between language and dialect. Consequently, there are variations over the exact number of languages. So for example, Crocombe puts the number at 62 and Ernst as high as 87. Yet as Gooberman-Hill notes linguists rarely claim to specify the exact number of languages in the country. See Crocombe, *The South Pacific*, 114; Manfred Ernst, *Winds of Change* (Suva: Pacific Conference of Churches, 1994), 115; Rachael Jane Sara Gooberman-Hill, "The Constraints Of "Feeling Free": Becoming Middle Class in Honiara (Solomon Islands)" (PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1999), 17.

traders and whalers around Makira harbour.¹⁶ In any case, it has developed as a *lingua franca* and enables Melanesians of quite different languages and cultures to communicate with each other. This unifying factor leads authors such as Jourdan to go as far as suggesting that it represents, or at least has the potential to be, a significant stepping stone towards fostering a sense of national consciousness in the country.¹⁷

While Solomon Islands, like most of Melanesia, is unique in the sense of the immense cultural diversity of the region, there are some basic similarities and features common to many Solomon Islands societies. It is these that I wish to identify as key Melanesian concepts and understanding these will help in understanding the issues with which this thesis deals.

2. Preliminary Issues and Difficulties

In order to understand how Solomon Islands societies function, one must first explore certain key Melanesian concepts and how they operate as an interconnected whole within societies. These key concepts are identified by Mantovani, an expatriate theologian, who although writing in the Papua New Guinea context, provides us with a useful starting point for our discussion in Solomon Islands. However, any attempt at a general outline of Melanesian concepts remains problematic for at least three main reasons:

First, Mantovani is writing in Papua New Guinea and the focus of this thesis is Solomon Islands. Although both part of Melanesia, the countries are geographically and culturally diverse. On the one hand Papua New Guinea, although containing a large number of smaller islands, is largely one landmass, meaning that a large number of its peoples and cultures are separated by land boundaries, be they valleys, mountains or

¹⁶ See Fox, *The Story of the Solomons*, 68-69; MacNeil, *Sweet Horizons: A History of the Solomon Islands*, 122-123. Pijin is a kind of broken English with a different grammatical structure mixed with some local Melanesian terms.

¹⁷ Jourdan has three main reasons for this assertion. First, pijin prevents ethnic rivalry that could stem from one vernacular becoming too visible and important in the country. Secondly, it is a local alternative to English in a country trying to be free from its colonial legacy. Thirdly, it is learned quickly by Solomon Islanders, even those who have not had contact with it from an early age. See Jourdan, "Stepping-Stones to National Consciousness: The Solomon Islands Case," 110-111; Crocombe, *The South Pacific*, 113-114.

rivers, and on the other Solomon Islands is a chain of islands, largely separating cultures and peoples by sea.¹⁸

Alongside the diversity of environment comes the diversity of cultures. Some scholars would argue that it is difficult to speak meaningfully about Melanesia at all and so they opt to research specific Melanesian cultures instead.¹⁹ Moreover, as Melanesia has, in the words of Knauff, “been more heavily ‘anthropologized’ over the last hundred years than most world areas”, the diversity of the various anthropological perspectives when added to diverse Melanesian cultures, creates even more diversity.²⁰ The terms “Melanesia” and “Solomon Islands” are theoretical categories and constructs created by anthropologists and colonial powers alike that do not adequately account for the immense social cultural and political diversity within them.²¹ Chowning asks the question whether Melanesia can even be considered as a single cultural area at all, noting that every anthropologist who has tried to generalize about Melanesia also emphasizes its enormous diversity.²² While admitting that there are some common cultural traits which do occur across the region, she concludes that, “it is literally impossible to make more than a handful of generalizations that will apply to even the majority of the societies in Melanesia.”²³ This complexity is compounded by the difficulty of drawing boundaries between cultures because, according to Sillitoe, “any one part of the area fades into another without any abrupt linguistic, cultural or other changes.”²⁴ This represents the dilemma for anyone attempting to classify Melanesia, because the region covers people that do have some linguistic, biological and cultural

¹⁸ Sillitoe draws our attention to how the natural environment of Melanesia is as diverse as its cultures; it contains small islands that can be coral atolls or volcanic peaks and large islands with high rugged mountain chains. Papua New Guinea as a large landmass can be categorised into three regions. 1. The coastal areas. 2. The lowland plains of the great rivers. 3. The highlands or interior mountains. See Sillitoe, *An Introduction to the Anthropology of Melanesia: Culture and Tradition*, 1-4.

¹⁹ See for example Clement Papa, "The Sacrament of Reconciliation in Melpa," *Catalyst: Social Pastoral Journal for Melanesia* 26, no. 1 (1996): 46.

²⁰ Bruce M Knauff, *From Primitive to Postcolonial in Melanesia and Anthropology* (Michigan: The University of Michigan, 1999), 4.

²¹ Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 30.

²² Ann Chowning, *An Introduction to the People's and Cultures of Melanesia*, Second ed. (Menlo Park: Cummings Publishing Company, 1977), 2; G W Trompf, *Payback: The Logic of Retribution in Melanesian Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 24; Sillitoe, *An Introduction to the Anthropology of Melanesia: Culture and Tradition*, xix.

²³ Chowning, *An Introduction to the People's and Cultures of Melanesia*, 2.

²⁴ Sillitoe, *An Introduction to the Anthropology of Melanesia: Culture and Tradition*, 1.

affinity, an “ill-defined sameness”, but this does not imply uniformity, meaning that Melanesia exists as one of the most varied cultural places on earth.²⁵

Both Trompf and MacDonald recognize that there are a number of themes or commonalities running across the many religious belief systems of the region, so much so as to enable the term “Melanesian religions” to have some meaning. Such common themes would include relationships between the ancestors and the living community, the association of spirits with the land, the importance of ritual, and the handing on of traditions.²⁶ Although MacDonald admits that “ideas about the world and symbolic practices for participating in, and maximizing cosmic life, differ from group to group.”²⁷ Consequently, I am always faced with the difficulty of generalizing across the extremely diverse Melanesian region and even within one area of that region, the Solomon Islands context. Yet, there are some cultural and social similarities that extend across countries in the region. This is why the key concepts that Mantovani identifies have some affinity to Solomon Islands and are identified by anthropologists working in specific cultures therein.

Secondly, Mantovani identifies key Melanesian concepts as part of a “traditional” Melanesian value system, but this is problematic because of the impact of Melanesian and European culture contact from the initial Spanish explorers of Melanesia in the sixteenth century to the missionaries, traders and colonial powers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this context, what does the term “traditional” mean?

If we take it to mean pre-contact Melanesian society then most, if not all, of the descriptions of this period come from European accounts. In other words, they are descriptions of pre-contact cultures from the contact period.²⁸ These are descriptions that project into a past that has already been fundamentally altered by the interaction of Melanesian and European cultures, making any retrieval of “traditional” or untouched Melanesian culture almost, if not impossible. Likewise if we wish to describe how

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ G W Trompf, *Melanesian Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 12-33; Mary MacDonald, "Thinking and Teaching with the Indigenous Traditions of Melanesia," in *Beyond Primitivism: Indigenous Religious Traditions and Modernity*, ed. Jacob K Olupona (New York: Routledge, 2004), 316.

²⁷ MacDonald, "Thinking and Teaching with the Indigenous Traditions of Melanesia," 316.

²⁸ Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 31.

“traditional” Melanesian concepts operate in contemporary Melanesian societies we need to be aware that what is “traditional” has already fundamentally changed not only in its interaction with European contact but also in its interaction with other Melanesian peoples and cultures. Whiteman argues that based on the archaeological and linguistic evidence available, culture contact and change was occurring between Melanesians even prior to European contact meaning that what was “traditional” for one Melanesian culture was already altered by its interaction with others.²⁹ This, argues Keesing, means that the “authentic” past was never some kind of unambiguous reality. Rather, prior to European contact, the Pacific was a multifaceted and complex series of social worlds and realities.³⁰

There is always the danger of idealising the “traditional” past as some kind of pre-contact utopia, a golden age which may in itself be a European construct or figment of European imagination.³¹ This is not restricted to European commentators either, Melanesians are just as capable of either following European constructs or reconstructing an idealised and romanticised past which may never have existed in the first place. Expatriates interpreting what is “traditional” and what is “Melanesian” write the majority of socio-anthropological commentaries on “traditional” Melanesia and cannot escape the relativity of their own context, beliefs and interpretative framework which determine what and how they interpret. Furthermore, Melanesian cultures are not static but in a constant state of flux, so what might have been interpreted as “traditional” Melanesian culture in 1939 may be quite different from findings in 2008. Who the interpreter is and when he or she is writing are important factors when considering the value, strengths and limitations of the interpretation.

This becomes even more complicated when we consider the impact of the urban context on “traditional” Melanesian culture. Both Jourdan and Goberman-Hill have noted how the development of Honiara, the capital city of Solomon Islands, has created an urban middle class independent from the control of tradition or custom of “traditional” village

²⁹ Ibid; Sillitoe, *An Introduction to the Anthropology of Melanesia: Culture and Tradition*, xviii.

³⁰ Roger M Keesing, "Creating the Past: Custom and Identity in the Contemporary Pacific," *The Contemporary Pacific* 1, no. 1 & 2 (1989): 25.

³¹ Ibid., 30-31.

life.³² Goberman-Hill describes how this group lives within an ethnically plural setting and aspire to modern lifestyles which value town above home or village. While claiming that such an urban class often seek to reject ethnicity or “traditional” custom, she identifies a dynamic where custom is still used to maintain identity and ethnicity.³³ There is a delicate balance between being free from the constraints of kinship obligations of “home” while maintaining some degree of attachment with life at “home”.³⁴

Jourdan argues that particularly among the younger population of Solomon Islanders living in town, nationalism comes before kinship affiliation. They are Solomon Islanders before being from Kwara’ae, Arosi, Reef Islands and so on.³⁵ Having said that, she is also aware that “traditional” Melanesian culture continues to function, be it in a changed context. The interaction between foreign and local cultures in the urban context may well ensure some independence from the control of village life and its “traditional” customs, but she concedes that it also ensures some continuity with contemporary village life. Kinship affiliations remain the most important pole of identification in Honiara and continue to define social relationships and obligations.³⁶ Melanesian “culture” is undergoing a profound change in the urban setting but it continues to function be it in different form for a different setting.

Having said all of this, any definition of “traditional” Melanesian culture may be difficult but it does not preclude tracing similarities across Melanesian cultures which interact with and shape each other. For example, Hogbin may have been writing about the To’abaitans of North Malaita in 1939 but there are affinities with Keesing’s work among the Kwaio of Malaita in 1982 and Burt’s work among the Kwara’ae of Malaita in 1993.³⁷ While I must be aware of the cultural relativity of all such interpretations, their findings can still enable me to trace some commonalities across cultures.³⁸

³² Jourdan, "Stepping-Stones to National Consciousness: The Solomon Islands Case," 111-113; Goberman-Hill, "The Constraints Of "Feeling Free": Becoming Middle Class in Honiara (Solomon Islands)", 29-57, 224-227.

³³ Goberman-Hill, "The Constraints Of "Feeling Free": Becoming Middle Class in Honiara (Solomon Islands)", 29.

³⁴ Often people living in Honiara refer to their Island and village of their origin as “home”. Many will live and work in Honiara but will return “home” after they retire or finish work.

³⁵ Jourdan, "Stepping-Stones to National Consciousness: The Solomon Islands Case," 112-113.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ The concept of ancestral spirits being a good example. See Ian A Hogbin, *Experiments in Civilisation: The Effects of European Culture on a Native Community of the Solomon Islands* (London: Routledge &

Thirdly, Mantovani highlights the difficulty of finding the precise meaning of the various customs practised in different Melanesian societies. He observes that often Melanesians, when asked about certain actions or reactions, would only say, “That is the way we do it”, or “That is the way of the ancestors.” People felt strongly about actions or reactions, “but never had the time, it seemed, to analyse their behaviour and expose its underlying rules.”³⁹

Such comments are echoed by anthropologists and writers working across Solomon Islands and seem to highlight an underlying similarity across Melanesian cultures, namely that there is very little interest in questions of one’s ultimate origins or the systematic overview of one’s culture: rather, one is part of a system that works. This point is expressed by a number of writers including Scheffler, working among the people of Choiseul in the Western Solomons, who claimed that they were totally ignorant of their remote origins and “did not evince much interest in such matters.”⁴⁰ Hviding, in his assessment of the people of the Marovo lagoon of New Georgia, noted that, “The realms of humanity and divinity are ambiguously defined in Marovo oral tradition,” and oral traditions are “remarkable for their lack of specific myths of origin.”⁴¹ Coombe, in her assessment of Melanesians generally, claimed that it was almost impossible to set down in black and white the articles of the Melanesian’s dim and shadowy creed. “A Melanesian is not given to mental matters; he sees no need for it.”⁴² Ross, writing on the Baegu of Malaita, observed that “Since he lives it, he does not have to worry about how his system works.”⁴³ Keesing, working among the Kwaio of Malaita, noted that “The majority know less than they could, apparently understand

Kegan Paul, 1939; reprint, 1969), 112; Roger M Keesing, *Kwaio Religion: The Living and the Dead in a Solomon Island Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 30; Ben Burt, *Tradition & Christianity: The Colonial Transformation of a Solomon Islands Society* (Harwood Academic Publishers, 1993), 53-54.

³⁸ My use of the word “traditional” is tempered throughout this thesis by the difficulty of defining what “traditional” Melanesian culture might actually be.

³⁹ Ennio Mantovani, "Traditional and Present Day Melanesian Values and Ethics," *Catalyst: Social Pastoral Journal for Melanesia* 21, no. 1 (1991): 66.

⁴⁰ Harold W Scheffler, *Choiseul Island Social Structure* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), 9.

⁴¹ Edvard Hviding, *Guardians of Marovo Lagoon: Practice, Place, and Politics in Maritime Melanesia* (Honolulu: University Of Hawai'i Press, 1996), 81-82.

⁴² Coombe, *Islands of Enchantment: Many-Sided Melanesia*, xxv.

⁴³ Harold M Ross, *Baegu: Social and Ecological Organization in Malaita, Solomon Islands* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 10.

only superficial layers of symbolism, and assume a pragmatic approach to the spirits they seek to live with in harmony, not understand.”⁴⁴

This is not to say, of course, that Melanesians did not have any form of mythology or a developed religious system, but it points rather to the priority for a people living in tribal societies of day-to-day survival and of harmony with those factors which ensure that survival. The priority here is not to question the system, but how to live successfully within it. Melanesians appear concerned with the everyday reality of living. It is this life that gives meaning and their greatest concern is with the challenges that face them in the here and now, more so than the abstract concepts of heaven, hell and life after death.⁴⁵ This point is important because on the one hand it can give us an insight into how Melanesian cultures and worldviews interpret “life” and on the other lead to the danger of European commentators reading into cultures what is not there, of “filling in the gaps” not with a Melanesian metaphysical framework but rather a European one that interprets “Melanesia.” There is also the danger of European commentators accepting stories recounted to them by Melanesians who in “filling the gaps” may actually be making up stories and concepts as they go along. Kent for example, warns how, “Anthropologists are regarded as a source of amusement, and the more credulous among them are taken for something of a ride, islanders delighting in making up wild stories for the notebooks of the visitors.”⁴⁶

Such comments should alert us to the dangers associated with any interpretation of “traditional” Melanesian culture and its cultural relativity.

3. Key Melanesian Concepts

Having identified the difficulties associated with any interpretation of Melanesian concepts, I now move on to Mantovani’s identification of key Melanesian concepts which, he claims, underpin Melanesian cultures and value systems. These are:

⁴⁴ Roger Keesing, *Kwaio Religion: The Living and the Dead in a Solomon Island Society*, 5.

⁴⁵ Alfred Alufurai, "Sacrifice in Melanesia," in *Pacific Rituals: Living or Dying?*, ed. Gweneth and Bruce Deverell (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1986), 45.

⁴⁶ Kent, *The Solomon Islands*, 33.

1. Community
2. Relationships
3. Exchange⁴⁷

I suggest that these are key concepts in the Solomon Islands context and I propose to examine each in turn, adding a further concept of Compensation/Payback to the list.

3.1 Community

Mantovani defines community in the Melanesian context as a group of people who are necessary for biological survival, for emotional support and for meaning.⁴⁸ He argues that community in this sense is of fundamental importance to Melanesians, as with any human beings in a society. However, when we consider the social organisation of Melanesian communities we begin to see just why “community” is of such critical importance.

Narokobi, a prominent Melanesian author, outlines twelve basic characteristics of what he sees as a “traditional” Melanesian social order/community, which are:

1. Small self-contained communities.
2. Leadership seldom extended over large areas.
3. Social structures based on common affinity.
4. Technology based on wood, stone, bone and fibre. The wheel and gun-powder had not been invented.
5. No written literature, only oral traditions.
6. Basically non-expansionist (due to technological limitations).
7. Almost all production was direct from the land and/or sea.
8. Wealth consisted mostly of perishable items, with shells, feathers and other durable items as media of exchange.
9. Human communities were mostly settled, but often moved their hamlets within their territory.

⁴⁷ Ennio Mantovani, "Ancestors in Melanesia," *Catalyst: Social Pastoral Journal for Melanesia* 20, no. 1 (1990): 26-27; Mantovani, "Traditional and Present Day Melanesian Values and Ethics," 65-71.

⁴⁸ Mantovani, "Traditional and Present Day Melanesian Values and Ethics," 67.

10. They were agriculturalists with domestic pigs, dogs and fowls.
11. The spirituality of the people was characterised by a unity of man with nature.
12. Language communities averaging under 3,000 persons per language. Some communities in Vanuatu have fewer than 3,000 persons speaking a language.⁴⁹

Many such communities were formed and ordered on the basis of clan identity. Among the Kaoka speakers of Guadalcanal, the expatriate anthropologist, Hogbin identified five autonomous Kaoka speaking villages made up of five distinct clan groupings. Each village consisted of a number of distinct hamlets separated from each other by bush. Land was owned by the different clan groupings and each hamlet was located on the respective land of that particular clan group. Each clan was identified by two bird totems and one fish totem, and members were expected to fulfil mutual obligations to fellow members and avoid marriage to members of the same clan. The clan system was also reflected in the “traditional” religion in that each clan had three great spirits—a warrior, a shark, and a snake to which sacrifices were offered.⁵⁰

Similar clan systems exist on Malaita, Makira, Santa Isabel and New Georgia but such a system is not universal to the whole of Melanesia.⁵¹ Rivers, in his classic study of traditional social systems in Melanesia, in fact identifies four:

1. Social organization based on totemic clans, following primarily matrilineal but also patrilineal descent.
2. A dual organization with a matrilineal descent.
3. Local groupings based on non-totemic exogamous clans which are primarily matrilineal but also patrilineal.
4. Social organization in which exogamous clans are absent and marriage is regulated only genealogically, with either matrilineal or patrilineal descent.⁵²

⁴⁹ Bernard Narokobi, *Lo Bilong Yumi Yet*, Point Series No.12 (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1989), 30.

⁵⁰ Ian A Hogbin, *A Guadalcanal Society: The Kaoka Speakers* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), 4, 72-79.

⁵¹ For Malaita see for example Keesing, *Kwaio Religion: The Living and the Dead in a Solomon Island Society*, 8-11; Burt, *Tradition & Christianity: The Colonial Transformation of a Solomon Islands Society*, 26-31. For Makira see Charles Elliot Fox, *The Threshold of the Pacific* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, Ltd, 1924), 33-34 For Santa Isabel see for example James P Mason, "Church and Culture on Santa Ysabel" (S. Th. Thesis, Joint Board of Theological Studies, Auckland, 1986), 5-6. For New Georgia see Hviding, *Guardians of Marovo Lagoon: Practice, Place, and Politics in Maritime Melanesia*, 136-137, 143-147.

Again, we are reminded of the immense variation and diversity of the region, but even then, there are some further common characteristics that are shared by Melanesian communities, in the sense that many were split into small “political units” (by which is meant a group “within which organized warfare should not take place”).⁵³ Even within one cultural-linguistic group, communities were divided into distinct groups and often led by a “big-man” who achieved his status through personal skills and leadership abilities.⁵⁴ Such units ranged from dispersed homesteads to small hamlets to “nucleated” villages and there was much variation in the relationships between kin groups and issues of land ownership. Nevertheless, regardless of what social system or form of social relationships or residential pattern, individuals in that society gave their allegiance to whatever group they were part of.⁵⁵ Each community would fight together, work together and feast together.⁵⁶ The community provided security and a sense of identity for its members. According to the expatriate, Brown, the identity of Melanesians was and still is bound up in relational structures of community. What makes a person is his or her role in relationships that exist within community.⁵⁷ The individual could find meaning and purpose only within the local community, hence the needs of that community took precedence over the individual and personal likes and dislikes.

In such a context, your “brother” would include only those from the same community and not those outside the group. In fact, anyone outside would be a potential, if not real, enemy. With this in mind, Whiteman argues that one of the greatest achievements of Christianity in Melanesia was the expanding of this definition of “brother” to include others from outside the cultural community and group.⁵⁸ For Mantovani, the primary importance of one’s community directs Melanesian ethical behaviour to the extent that,

⁵² W. H. R. Rivers, *The History of Melanesian Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914), 70. See also Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 56-58.

⁵³ Darrell L Whiteman, "Melanesia: Its People and Cultures," in *An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures*, ed. Darrell L Whiteman, *Point Series No. 5* (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1984), 93.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Chowning, *An Introduction to the People's and Cultures of Melanesia*, 41; Bird, "The Anatomy of the Crisis in Solomon Islands from a Theological Perspective," 53.

⁵⁶ Whiteman, "Melanesia: Its People and Cultures," 93.

⁵⁷ Terry Brown, "Communion and Personhood Part One: Personhood as a Tool to Reflect Upon Koinonia" (paper presented at the Anglican Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia Theological Hui, St John's Theological College, Auckland, 17th August 2005).

⁵⁸ Whiteman, "Melanesia: Its People and Cultures," 94.

“What helps the community is ethically good, what harms the community is ethically bad and what is indifferent to the community is indifferent.”⁵⁹ So for example, killing, stealing or lying are not bad in themselves, it depends on the motivation and aim of the action. Killing, stealing or lying to serve or help the community is ethically good, but any killing, stealing or lying, even if done for the community, causes harm to that community then it is ethically bad.⁶⁰

In this context, individual actions are accorded group significance particularly as the expatriate, Lively, argues, “where the effects may be considered social, public and interdependent to the extend (sic) that each person stands for the whole group.”⁶¹ He compares it to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament and particularly Joshua 7: 1-25: (The story of one man keeping plunder for himself and disobeying the Lord’s command.) Because of his actions the whole community was punished and cursed. It was only after he was punished and the sin removed that Israel was restored.⁶²

The community was a source of survival and identity for Melanesians and its needs were of primary importance, beyond the individual. Mantovani argues that the community itself is connected to the Melanesian value system. He claims that life itself seems to be the highest value in “traditional” Melanesian societies. Life here meaning “full-life” or “fullness of life” and covers well-being, health, wealth, prestige, offspring, good relations and so on. Negatively it implies lack of sickness, decay, barrenness or death.⁶³ “Such ‘full-life’ in ‘traditional’ Melanesian society used to be found only in the community so that practically ‘community’ became almost synonymous with ‘life’ and shared its value.”⁶⁴ This certainly has its parallels in Akao’s assessment of his own culture, the Baegu of North Malaita, Solomon Islands. He explains that one of the terms used to describe community is *figua mouri* literally meaning “living assembly”. A

⁵⁹ Mantovani, "Traditional and Present Day Melanesian Values and Ethics," 72.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Rich Lively, "Understanding God in the Payback System: A Model for Christian Discipleship," *Catalyst: Social Pastoral Journal for Melanesia* 24, no. 1 (1994): 55.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ennio Mantovani, "Traditional and Present Day Melanesian Values and Ethics," (1991): 68.

⁶⁴ Ennio Mantovani, "Christian Dialogue with Melanesian Values and Ethics," *Catalyst: Social Pastoral Journal for Melanesia* 20, no. 2 (1990): 97; Mantovani, "Ancestors in Melanesia," 26.

community in this sense is not just a gathering of people, but also a communion of living bodies.⁶⁵

3.2 Relationships

A community is not an abstract concept but involves people connected to each other through relationships. A Melanesian community consists of a web of relationships centred on three important issues, blood, marriage and land.⁶⁶ Following Mantovani, these relationships can be categorised in the following ways.

3.3 Relationships with the Ancestors

A Melanesian community is built on a complex web of relationships interwoven within it. These relationships involve not only the living, but also the dead relatives or ancestors. In fact, the dead of a community are as much part of that community as the living members and still live within it, be it in a different sphere of existence.⁶⁷

Therefore, a member of a Melanesian community is in constant relationship to his or her ancestors and it is important that a proper relationship be maintained in order to receive life. Such “life” expressed, for example, through success, good fortune, good health, strong family, security and so on, would ensure the avoidance of “lack of life” expressed, for example, as sickness or misfortune which are common signs of a broken relationship which makes the ancestral spirit angry.⁶⁸

Such a view would seem to support the work of expatriate anthropologist Keesing among the Kwaio of Malaita who observed that, “within the Kwaio world, ancestors have an immediacy as members of one’s group and participants in the everyday life of the community.”⁶⁹ In this context, the ancestral spirits are referred to as *adalo*. These

⁶⁵ Philemon Akao, "Ano Aabu (Sacred Earth) of the Baegu People: An Emerging Theme in Eco-Theology from a Melanesian Community" (M.Th.Thesis, University of Auckland, 2002), 17-18.

⁶⁶ Mantovani, "Traditional and Present Day Melanesian Values and Ethics," 68.

⁶⁷ Ennio Mantovani, "Traditional Values and Ethics," in *An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures*, ed. Darrell Whiteman, *Point Series No. 5* (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1984), 202.

⁶⁸ Ibid; Mantovani, "Ancestors in Melanesia," 30-31; Marilyn Rowsome, "Melanesian Traditional Religion," *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 17, no. 2 (2001): 40-41.

⁶⁹ Keesing, *Kwaio Religion: The Living and the Dead in a Solomon Island Society*, 30.

unseen forces or beings continue to interact with the living community and are perceived as “beings that help or punish: the source of success, gratification and security, and the cause of illness, death, and misfortune.”⁷⁰ Moreover, the *adalo* make and enforce rules that the community must follow. If such rules are broken, then the relationship suffers and the community will experience problems, sickness, misfortune and so on. In this context, right relationships with the ancestors is of critical importance for the everyday well-being and survival of the community.

Hogbin writing forty-three years before Keesing, appeared to observe a similar concept among the To’abaitans of North Malaita. Here the ancestral spirit known as *akalo* bestows its favour on the living through the power it possesses, *mamanaa*. If, however, rules of conduct are broken, the *akalo* will withdraw their *mamanaa*, leaving the person vulnerable to sorcery and hostile magic and therefore sickness and misfortune.⁷¹ Again, among the Lau people of Malaita ancestral spirits referred to as *agalo* act as protectors of the family, while among the Kwara’ae, Burt came to a similar conclusion that the spirits or *akalo* are of critical importance to the well-being of one’s family and community.⁷²

In this context, the Kwara’ae were concerned with maintaining good relationships to the *akalo* whose actions they saw in all the important events determining their lives. The spirits who took the most interest in the living were dead relatives who continued to watch over them and from whom the living sought cures for sickness, delivery from danger and misfortune, assistance in making new gardens, organising feasts and so on.⁷³

In order for the spirits to bestow their protection and blessing, the living had to obey their instructions and their demands. The living, in order to maintain a right relationship to the dead, were expected to obey the rules and obligations laid down in the

⁷⁰ Ibid., 33. A similar assessment can be found in David Akin, "Local and Foreign Spirits in Kwaio, Solomon Islands," in *Spirits in Culture, History, and Mind*, ed. Jeannette Marie Mageo and Alan Howard (New York: Routledge, 1996), 152.

⁷¹ Hogbin, *Experiments in Civilisation: The Effects of European Culture on a Native Community of the Solomon Islands*, 112. Hogbin is working particularly among the To’abaitan people of North Malaita.

⁷² For an examination of ancestral spirits in the Lau context see Walter G. Ivens, *The Island Builders of the Pacific* (London: Seeley, Service & Co. Limited, 1930). See Chapter 6 in particular. For the Kwara’ae of Malaita see Burt, *Tradition & Christianity: The Colonial Transformation of a Solomon Islands Society*, 73-74.

⁷³ Burt, *Tradition & Christianity: The Colonial Transformation of a Solomon Islands Society*, 53-54.

community, which included rules about relationships to others in that community, rules of personal and moral conduct and of the giving and exchanging of gifts with both the living and the dead.⁷⁴ Akao explains that, among the Baegu of Malaita, the consequences of failing to meet the expectations of the ancestral spirits and of maintaining right relationships was *adabala* meaning an impending catastrophe on both the natural environment and human beings. Crops failing, food becoming short, poor pig breeding and a weakening of community solidarity were all signs of the displeasure of the spirits and the impending catastrophe.⁷⁵

The anthropologist, Scheffler, has noted similar ancestral spirits among the people of Choiseul in the Western Solomons. There they are known as *manuru* who could bestow power and blessing. Again in this case, it seems that right relationships needed to be maintained with the *manuru* or misfortune, bad luck or sickness would follow.⁷⁶ Mason, a Melanesian from Santa Isabel, notes that in the Zabana dialect of that island ancestral spirits are referred to as *madeuna*, while in Bugotu dialect they are *taruna*.⁷⁷ Codrington, writing back in 1891, has also noted similar concepts on Gela as *tindalo*, Sa'a (Malaita) as *lio'a* and on Makira as *ataro*.⁷⁸

The observations of such writers seems to indicate that ancestral spirits, played an essential role in the everyday survival and well-being of a Melanesian community but they were not the only spirits interacting in the Melanesian world. Hogbin, working among the Koaka of Guadalcanal, identified three types of spirit, interacting with communities. First, are the spirits of the dead, with outstanding warriors being set aside; second are spirits incarnate as sharks and third snake spirits. Each clan would then worship one warrior, one shark and one snake spirit, in addition to the spirits of the

⁷⁴ Ibid., 55.

⁷⁵ Philemon Akao, "Ecological Consciousness: A Melanesian Experience" (A Systematic Theology Research Paper, University of Auckland, 2000), 16.

⁷⁶ See Scheffler, *Choiseul Island Social Structure*, Chapter 5.

⁷⁷ Mason, "Church and Culture on Santa Ysabel", 21.

⁷⁸ R H Codrington, *The Melanesians, Studies in Their Anthropology and Folk-Lore* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891), 124-125. See the chapter on 'Religion'. A detailed account of the *adaro* ghosts can also be found in Fox, *The Threshold of the Pacific*. Particularly the chapter on spiritual beings. It is also worth noting that the *adaro* ghosts of Makira are different to some of the other ancestral ghosts of other islands because many of them were believed to be incarnate in animals. Not all ghosts were deemed important either. It would depend on whether the person was important before death, either by having a significant role in the community or by demonstrating a particular skill.

ordinary dead worshipped by individuals, families or sub-clans.⁷⁹ There are also various other ghosts and spirits, both benevolent and malevolent at work in the various Melanesian worldviews, meaning that ancestral spirits are only part of the whole spiritual worldview. Yet they were important because they ensured the survival of the community and offered protection from the various forms of hostile magic and malevolent spirits at work.

3.4 Relationships within the Community

Melanesian communities depended not only on ancestral spirits for their continuing survival and well-being but also on the relationships between the members of the community which united and strengthened the community from within. Key to this was observing cultural rules and obligations to ensure that relationships were correctly and properly maintained. This, according to missionary-anthropologist Whiteman, indicates that Melanesian societies did have a comprehensive moral code that guided the behaviour of individuals in their relationships with each other.⁸⁰

This moral code is seen in the various rules and obligations demanded of individuals in the various kinship structures of Melanesian societies. For example, Burt observed that among the Kwara'ae of Malaita the social order is a way of life governed by rules. The key concept here is *tabu* meaning that something is forbidden with spiritual sanction.⁸¹ *Tabu* is a governing principle of all relationships in the society and also sets the standard of social and moral behaviour in that society. While the term is in some ways negative in that it forbids something, it also serves a positive function by preserving and protecting the thing in question. Burt gives various examples of how *tabu* functions to set the basic standards of social behaviour in the community. For example, a person's body is *tabu*, in that physical contact or comment on it is regulated by rules of respect to safeguard the person from physical or verbal abuse, attack or injury. A person's property is also *tabu* to protect it from theft or damage which would cause offence to the owner. A person's house is *tabu* to those who do not live there in order to protect the

⁷⁹ Hogbin, *A Guadalcanal Society: The Kaoka Speakers*, 73. See also his treatment of the Kaoka religion in Chapter 7.

⁸⁰ Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 225.

⁸¹ Burt, *Tradition & Christianity: The Colonial Transformation of a Solomon Islands Society*, 32. As Burt notes this is only one definition of the term, it has also been defined as "sacred" and/or "off limits".

household from theft, damage or misbehaviour and swearing is *tabu* because it proclaims indecent acts that would cause offence to the hearer.⁸²

Tabu then, governs all social relationships between members of the community. There are clear social rules, roles and obligations to be followed and obeyed. Disobeying or breaking such rules results in the breaking of “right relationships” expected within the society. Variations of this *tabu* concept have been identified across Solomon Islands in, for example, the Kwaio and Beagu people of Malaita and beyond to Guadalcanal and the Western Solomons.⁸³

It appears, then, that in many Melanesian societies, there are clearly defined rules of social behaviour, conduct and expectations on all members of the society. Knowing and obeying these rules maintains the proper and right relationships between members of that community.

3.5 Relationships to Other Communities

The Melanesian world was focused on the survival and well-being of the immediate community within which one found a sense of identity and worth. This meant that, according to Mantovani, any relationships to outside communities would be categorised by the importance they have for one’s own community.⁸⁴ The first category would include outside communities that were essential to the life of one’s own community including allies in war or trade partners. The second category would include outside communities who were indifferent and the third, those who were enemies. Concerning this third group, many cultures in Melanesia have a term for enemies which implies that they are less than human because they exist outside the immediate community and cultural group.⁸⁵

⁸² Ibid., 35.

⁸³ The Kwaio use the word *abu*, which has a similar meaning as *tabu*, see Keesing, *Kwaio Religion: The Living and the Dead in a Solomon Island Society*, 31., In Baegu it is *aabu*, see Ross, *Baegu: Social and Ecological Organization in Malaita, Solomon Islands*, 311. In To’abaita it is *ambu*, see Hogbin, *Experiments in Civilisation: The Effects of European Culture on a Native Community of the Solomon Islands*, 13-16. Hogbin also mentions the taboos in effect among the Kaoka of Guadalcanal, indicating a similar concept. Such taboos are found across Solomon Islands.

⁸⁴ Mantovani, "Traditional Values and Ethics," 203.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

3.6 Relationships to the Environment

The environment plays a major role in Melanesian worldviews principally because it is part of an interconnected cosmic order which includes human beings, ancestral spirits and the various spirits and powers within nature. This means that humanity and the environment are fundamentally interconnected and continually interacting with each other. This requires human beings to be in right relationships not only with ancestral spirits but also with elements of nature such as land.⁸⁶ This has considerable ethical implications because human beings do not have authority or ownership over land.

People can use land and profit from it, but in the “traditional” sense they cannot own or abuse it, rather it is an integral part of one’s tribal identity and community.⁸⁷ Land must be cared for and respected, meaning that humanity must always maintain a positive relationship with land and nature generally. Mantovani argues that land ownership and disputes in Papua New Guinea are not primarily about a question of money, rather they are ethical questions. Land can be used but not sold because human beings and land are related and interconnected. In this sense selling land would be akin to selling one’s own relatives or family members.⁸⁸

This relationship is also of great importance in the Solomon Islands context. Among the Kwara’ae, Mantovani’s assessment of land appears to have some affinity, as Burt notes, “In the past Kwara’ae valued land and its products not as commodities but as the basis of relationships.”⁸⁹ Ipo, from ’Are’are, Malaita, writes that everywhere in Solomon Islands land had spiritual meaning as it represented the link between past and future. It had once belonged to the ancestors who remain present in it, particularly at sacred places associated with them, and it would be needed for future generations to come.⁹⁰ Throughout the islands there are, for example, places where the spirits of the dead are

⁸⁶ Rich Lively, "Understanding God in the Payback System: A Model for Christian Discipleship," 55.

⁸⁷ See L Maenu'u, "Land within Traditional Societies of the Solomon Islands," *Ethnies: Human Rights and Tribal Peoples* 4, no. 8 9 & 10 (1989): 30-32.

⁸⁸ Mantovani, "Traditional and Present Day Melanesian Values and Ethics," 68.

⁸⁹ Burt, *Tradition & Christianity: The Colonial Transformation of a Solomon Islands Society*, 31.

⁹⁰ John Ipo, "Land and Economy," in *Ples Blong Iumi: Solomon Islands, the Past Four Thousand Years*, ed. Hugh Laracy (Suva: The University of the South Pacific, 1989), 123.

supposed to dwell. These include Marape Island near Guadalcanal, Anagwou Island near Malaita, San Jorge Island near Santa Isabel and Three Sisters Island near Makira.⁹¹

Solomon Islanders often saw themselves as trustees of the land, careful to look after it and maintain it, for if the ancestors present in it were offended, crops would not grow well.⁹² A good example of this is Akao's examination of *Ano a'abu* in his own Baegu context. The term *Ano a'abu* literally means holy or sacred ground and involves a dynamic relationship between the ancestral spirits and the living community. It is the ancestors who are guardians of the land while the living are expected to care, nurture and tend it.⁹³ Ross describes Baegu religion as, "a partnership between the living and the spirits of the dead to maintain the fertility of the land where the ancestors are buried and that the lineage owns."⁹⁴ Land and its treatment here, is very much part of a relational process.

Melanesian communities then appear to exist and be maintained through a complex web of relationships between relatives, ancestors and land or environment. Yet these relationships are not simply biological or legal links, but rather important rights, duties, expectations and obligations that connect and interconnect every member of the community with each other (the living) and with the dead.⁹⁵ This is why, in almost every Melanesian community there seems to be a strong system of kinship connected to duty and mutual obligations. For example among the Kaoka of Guadalcanal Hogbin identified kinship terms and behaviour and the obligations and responsibilities expected of each, whether parents and children, brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts, cousins, or other relatives.⁹⁶ It is these relationships and the expectations and obligations that they entail that are crucial for the survival of the community. They provide one's sense of identity and a sense of security and meaning for each individual member.

⁹¹ Akao, "Ecological Consciousness: A Melanesian Experience", 4.

⁹² Ipo, "Land and Economy," 123; Maenu'u, "Land within Traditional Societies of the Solomon Islands," 31-32; Hou, "People of Solomon Islands: From the Past to the Present," 17.

⁹³ Akao, "Ecological Consciousness: A Melanesian Experience", 12; Akao, "Ano Aabu (Sacred Earth) of the Baegu People: An Emerging Theme in Eco-Theology from a Melanesian Community", 21, 41-42.

⁹⁴ Ross, *Baegu: Social and Ecological Organization in Malaita, Solomon Islands*, 162. See also Akao, "Ano Aabu (Sacred Earth) of the Baegu People: An Emerging Theme in Eco-Theology from a Melanesian Community", 40-41.

⁹⁵ Mantovani, "Traditional and Present Day Melanesian Values and Ethics," 68-69.

⁹⁶ Hogbin, *A Guadalcanal Society: The Kaoka Speakers*, 10-18. This characteristic is also true of many other Melanesian societies.

This leads us to Mantovani's main point that fullness of life, the highest value of Melanesian society, is found in the community and the way to experience it is through the fulfilment of one's obligations and the maintenance of right relationships with relatives, ancestors and the environment. Whiteman describes this fullness of life as the continuation, protection, maintenance and celebration of life in the sense of cosmic life and renewal. Human beings are the central focus of this cosmic life but are continually interacting with spirit beings, plants, animals and the land around them. These all form part of the cosmic life along with human beings and there can be no distinctions between life and death or sacred and secular, because they all collapse into each other and form part of the same cosmic life.⁹⁷ Here the maintenance of relationships with all parts of the cosmic whole is of great importance, as they form part of a relational web that supports, enables and maintains life essential for the community.⁹⁸

In his examination of Solomon Island societies, the mission-anthropologist, Tippett, claims that the failure to fulfil one's responsibilities and hence one's obligations in the community was a serious matter and viewed as an anti-social sin.⁹⁹ It was a serious matter precisely because the identity and fortunes of that community were at stake. In the Papua New Guinea context right relationships and their maintenance are identified by the *tok pisin* word "lo", a word and concept first researched in the Madang area.¹⁰⁰ According to the expatriate Fugmann, its underlying concept, be it with some modifications, is representative of most Melanesian societies.¹⁰¹ In his observations the term describes, among other things, the kindness, benevolence and generosity of a person who shows hospitality and concern for others. This attitude towards others is a sign that the person is in tune with themselves and the wisdom of ancestors. The result is a person with a peaceful and conciliatory attitude who demonstrates maturity and, in so doing, avoids confrontation or rash actions.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 65.

⁹⁸ See Gernot Fugmann, "Salvation in Melanesian Religions," in *An Introduction to Melanesian Religions*, ed. Ennio Mantovani, *Point Series No.6* (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1984), 283.

⁹⁹ A R Tippett, *Solomon Islands Christianity: A Study in Growth and Obstruction* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1967), 17.

¹⁰⁰ Tok pisin is the Papua New Guinea version of Pijin language.

¹⁰¹ Fugmann, "Salvation in Melanesian Religions," 284.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

Lo is or describes the predominant value within the community and everyone would be expected to show it in their relationships with others. *Lo* can be understood as, “a very intricate system of reciprocity, which directs the life of all members of a society.”¹⁰³ Mantovani describes *lo* as “life itself” simply because proper relationships mean a healthy community which, in turn, is the way to “life”.¹⁰⁴ He also describes it as “proper relationships” and, with Fugmann, seems to agree that it is representative of most Melanesian societies comparing it to the Solomon Islands concept of *kastom* which seems to have a similar meaning.¹⁰⁵

3.7 Exchange and Reciprocity

Relationships are established, repaired and strengthened through the process of exchange and reciprocity. In Papua New Guinea Macdonald has observed that, “Within the traditional community, relationships are maintained through reciprocity: that is, a relationship tending towards equivalence is sustained between members by giving and receiving, by helping and being helped.”¹⁰⁶

Any relationship within the community involves exchange, the giving and receiving of tangible gifts. The giving of a gift can establish a relationship and if another gift is returned, then the relationship is accepted and established. If one has caused offence to another, it is not enough to say sorry: one must do sorry and give a gift. Eventually a gift will be returned and that is the final sign that peace has been made.¹⁰⁷ In addition, in his examination of early Melanesian economics, Belshaw has established that the most powerful incentive for the giving and lending of goods, or the giving of the right to use objects, stems from the fact that, “at some later date when occasion demanded, he could obtain a reciprocal favour.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Mantovani, "Traditional and Present Day Melanesian Values and Ethics," 69.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Mary MacDonal, "Melanesian Communities: Past and Present," in *An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures*, ed. Darrell L. Whiteman, *Point Series No. 5* (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1984), 216.

¹⁰⁷ Mantovani, "Traditional and Present Day Melanesian Values and Ethics," 69.

¹⁰⁸ Cyril Belshaw, *Changing Melanesia: Social Economics of Culture Contact* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1976).

Exchange is of vital importance to the community. It serves to strengthen existing relationships, establish new ones (including those with other communities) and mend broken ones. Trompf notes that, Melanesians grow up learning the intricate complexities of reciprocal relations. They learn how to behave towards relatives and the subtleties of giving. They also learn how to assess equivalence, or to gauge whether somebody has been given an inadequate amount at a feast, whether somebody is too greedy or has failed to meet his obligations. They learn to interpret pointed hints or repeated rumour and gossip.¹⁰⁹

The overarching principle of fulfilling these obligations is quite simply, you help me: I help you. Put negatively this means, if you don't help me, then I won't help you. Hogbin identified this principle operating on North Malaita, Solomon Islands. For example, he observed how one man in a village lived in a hovel with a leaky roof and had to manage as best he could alone. He had apparently made excuses when other people had a house to build and they retaliated by refusing to help him when his old house fell into disrepair. There were also two or three other people with small gardens because they had to cultivate them unaided, again due to past laziness in helping others.¹¹⁰

This also seems to be the case among the Kwara'ae of Malaita, with Burt noting that, "the idiom which dominates most economic exchanges in Kwara'ae community life is 'mutual help'." The Kwara'ae do not help one another out of "disinterested generosity" but it is a moral obligation with the expectation of some kind of eventual return.¹¹¹

Reciprocity however is not limited to mutual assistance: it can also have negative connotations. So for example, the "you help me: I help you" system of reciprocal exchange also translates to "you fight me: I fight you" or "you destroy my property: I destroy your property."¹¹² Mantovani claims that people's experience of being helped by the community and belief in the value of reciprocity were the strongest motivations

¹⁰⁹ Trompf, *Melanesian Religion*, 65.

¹¹⁰ Hogbin, *Experiments in Civilisation: The Effects of European Culture on a Native Community of the Solomon Islands*, 58-59.

¹¹¹ Burt, *Tradition & Christianity: The Colonial Transformation of a Solomon Islands Society*, 38.

¹¹² Edward L Schieffelin, *The Sorrow of the Lonely and the Burning of the Dancers* (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1977), 119. Cited in Michael Kteng, "Compensation as Reciprocity: A Melanesian View," *Catalyst: Social Pastoral Journal for Melanesia* 23, no. 2 (1993): 91.

for people keeping the value system, but there were also enforcement mechanisms in place to ensure it was kept and maintained.¹¹³

The first of these, gossip, was the most common mechanism in a face-to-face society. People would talk about another's behaviour if he or she transgressed. This would pull people back into line, because gossip encouraged shame and fear of shame kept people conforming to the system.¹¹⁴ Hogbin refers to how this concept operates in a specific Solomon Islands context observing that, "The normal person is acutely sensitive about his reputation and the good opinion of his fellows, and the slighting references continually made about those who disregard their duties and obligations is a constant warning to others."¹¹⁵

The second enforcement mechanism was the fear of sickness or misfortune which were signs of lack of life and the failure to fulfil cultural and kinship obligations, resulting in a broken relationship. In this situation, any sickness that could not be cured would result in the community trying to find which relationship had been broken and against whom or what, the living, the ancestral spirits or the land.¹¹⁶ Keesing seems to have identified a similar concept among the Kwaio of Malaita, noting that when an illness or misfortune occurs a father or neighbour will break knotted strips of cordyline leaf, while "talking" to the spirits to find out which one is causing the trouble and why.¹¹⁷

If such a broken relationship was discovered, then the way to mend it was through some kind of exchange, the giving of a gift, or very often the preparation of a meal. Regardless of whether the broken relationship was with relatives, ancestors or the land the remedy was the same, through exchange.¹¹⁸ If such an exchange was with ancestors or the land it was not so much a sacrifice to spirits or the dead but rather an exchange aimed at mending the broken relationship within the community. This according to Mantovani was not a profession of faith in supernatural powers but rather a statement

¹¹³ Mantovani, "Traditional and Present Day Melanesian Values and Ethics," 74.

¹¹⁴ Ibid; Trompf, *Payback: The Logic of Retribution in Melanesian Religions*, 112-113.

¹¹⁵ Hogbin, *Experiments in Civilisation: The Effects of European Culture on a Native Community of the Solomon Islands*, 59; Burt, *Tradition & Christianity: The Colonial Transformation of a Solomon Islands Society*, 38.

¹¹⁶ Mantovani, "Traditional and Present Day Melanesian Values and Ethics," 70; Papa, "The Sacrament of Reconciliation in Melpa," 49-50.

¹¹⁷ Keesing, *Kwaio Religion: The Living and the Dead in a Solomon Island Society*, 33.

¹¹⁸ Mantovani, "Traditional and Present Day Melanesian Values and Ethics," 70-71.

about the nature of a community which comprises the living, the dead and the land and the nature of sickness and misfortune, the consequences of a broken relationship.¹¹⁹

3.8 Compensation and Payback

The concepts of compensation and payback are the subject of much debate and discussion among anthropologists, but it is important that we place them in the wider context of exchange and reciprocity and as integrated into the Melanesian worldview.¹²⁰ Compensation in a general sense can be defined as, “a form of conflict management...in which aggrieved party or parties demand some sort of payment from another party or parties”. The payment is thought to be proportionate to the severity of the act which precipitated the dispute and implies acceptance of responsibility by the donors and willingness to terminate the dispute by the recipients.”¹²¹

Compensation needs to be seen in the light of Mantovani’s observations about the Melanesian value system. It is interconnected to the exchange process and the attempt to address and repair a broken relationship. The demand for compensation or payback is part of what Trompf calls “The Logic of Retribution”. Life for Melanesians, he claims, is a continuous interweaving of gains and losses, giving and taking, wealth and destitution, joy and sorrow, vitality and death.¹²² Compensation is an essential part of this interwoven worldview and part of the maintaining of balance in the cosmic order. If a person is offended or hurt, for example, they are obligated to exact the same penalty or hurt on the one who initiated the offence. If the offence is not paid back or compensated for, the cosmic order is upset and the essential balance of life disturbed. Both compensation and payback are necessary to confront forces that disturb this essential equilibrium of order among the living.¹²³

Some of these issues discussed so far can be seen more clearly by examining the compensation concept in a specific Melanesian culture, and I propose to do so by focusing on the To’abaitan people of North Malaita, Solomon Islands. Hogbin has

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ See Michael Kteng, "Compensation as Reciprocity: A Melanesian View," 91-112.

¹²¹ Richard Scaglione, *Homicide Compensation in PNG* (Port Moresby: Law Reform Commission, 1981), 1-2. Cited in Kteng, "Compensation as Reciprocity: A Melanesian View," 91.

¹²² See Trompf, *Payback: The Logic of Retribution in Melanesian Religions*, 1.

¹²³ Lively, "Understanding God in the Payback System: A Model for Christian Discipleship," 56.

researched this region in his book *Experiments in Civilisation: The Effects of European Culture on a Native Community of the Solomon Islands* and James Ofasia's article on *Traditional Toabaitan Methods of Forgiveness and Reconciliation* builds on this. Much of what I write comes from these two authors. This is not to say that compensation as a concept only exists in this region. Much of what Hogbin and Ofasia observe is very similar to other regions of Malaita, including the Kwara'ae, Kwaio and Baegu discussed in this chapter. The concept of compensation also extends, in varying degrees, beyond Malaita to most of the other Solomon Islands. Consequently, while being careful not to overgeneralize, the To'abaitan concept of compensation is similar to other regions and communities in Solomon Islands.

According to Ofasia in traditional To'abaitan culture attempts at forgiveness and reconciliation would occur when relationships were broken "between tribes, families, individuals, and when there is defilement against the ancestral spirits."¹²⁴ Once a relationship has been broken, people will seek to restore it, precisely because the balance of the community is disturbed and must be restored, and to avoid payback from the offended party. This is not a matter of choice: one is obligated to do so. The restoration of any relationship will involve the following major concepts:

1. *Manatalubea*: (*manata* meaning mind or thoughts of the heart; and *lubea* meaning no longer bound by the offence and the obligation that must be satisfied). This involves an open public statement and action which occurs when the cause of division between two lines, clans, tribes, families or individuals has been resolved. This would involve some kind of exchange as a symbol of reconciliation given in front of the community.
2. *Kwaimania* (meaning reconciliation). No forgiveness or reconciliation can take place however without an exchange.¹²⁵

The type and amount of the exchange would be determined by the nature and severity of the offence as well as the kind of person or persons offended against.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ James Ofasia, "Traditional Toabaitan Methods of Forgiveness and Reconciliation," *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 19, no. 2 (2003): 10.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

Reconciliation and exchange would take place between aggrieved parties after incidents such as sorcery, tribal fighting or conflict between families. Importantly, it would be an exchange between both parties who had to be willing to reconcile. Reconciliation was never recognized if only one party was involved because the purpose was not to satisfy the demands of one group, but to put an end to the conflict and to restore relationships between both parties.¹²⁷

3.9 Compensation

So far I have been talking about exchange and, although part of the exchange process, compensation is a different concept. In To'abaitan culture *fa'abua'* (compensation) has three basic meanings:

1. Restoring honour to the one dishonoured.
2. Satisfying the mind of the offended.
3. The method used to restore peace quickly.¹²⁸

Exchange involves an exchange of gifts done by both parties, but compensation is effected not so much to restore a broken relationship, although this is part of it, but “to satisfy the mind of the offended in regards to the offence committed.”¹²⁹ Ofasia notes that this process of compensation is an obligation, which will also involve family members who are obligated to help.¹³⁰ The giving of compensation satisfies the mind of the offended and also secures and protects the life of the offender.¹³¹ However, compensation in itself is incomplete: it only succeeds in the cessation of hostilities or payback, but not as a means of forgiveness in itself or the restoration of the broken relationship. Consequently, a reconciliation process of exchange between the affected parties must follow compensation. If not then there is no real forgiveness and the ill-feeling will remain.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 15.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 16.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid., 19.

The compensation concept exists across Solomon Islands and it is an integrated part of the Melanesian worldview, another piece of the cosmic whole. When compensation is demanded or revenge carried out it is effectively because of a broken relationship which is essentially life-denying. Compensation and reconciliation result in the repairing and restoration of that relationship, hence they are not, in this sense, negative actions. Both compensation and payback are forms of exchange. Compensation is an exchange to compensate the offence committed, payback on the other hand is also an exchange of, for example, one act of violence for another. Compensation as seen in the To'abaitan context prevents payback and leads to a further process of reconciliation which, in turn, leads to the restoration of relationships and "life" expressed as wholeness and harmony within the community.

4. Concluding Remarks

From this brief examination of compensation in traditional To'abaitan society, we can begin to see the similarities and connections to the key Melanesian concepts identified in Mantovani. Compensation and payback are concepts that interconnect with notions of community, relationships and exchange and form part of an all-embracing cosmic system. Both Mantovani and Whiteman maintain that they all point to the protection and maintenance of life that is experienced by, and essential for, the survival of Melanesian societies. This is important because as we move on to our examination of *mana*, we will see that it, too, is interconnected with these key concepts and forms part of integrated Melanesian worldviews which are concerned with the acquisition, protection and maintenance of life that ensure both well-being and basic survival.

Chapter 2

Mana

The concept of mana is fundamental to Melanesian religions and cultures and interconnected with the key Melanesian concepts identified in the last chapter. It appears to be a universal concept across many of the diverse cultures of the region and is found in a number of Solomon Island languages and contexts, including Bambatana (Choiseul) as *mana*, in Roviana (New Georgia) as *minana*, in To'abaita (North Malaita) as *mamanaa*, in Koaka (Guadalcanal) as *nanama* and in Makira as *mena*.¹

It is a concept fundamental to the Melanesian mind and worldview and as the Melanesian writer Kelaepa puts it, "it is a phenomena which has been, and is deeply ingrained in [Melanesian] human consciousness, in all matters pertaining to the totality of life and death (as inseparable as breathing is essential to human life and existence.)"²

1. *Definitions of Mana*

Attempts at defining the concept of *mana* are many and there is a great deal of literature on the subject. This process, however, has remained controversial as debates arose over its precise nature and meaning. The anthropologist, Firth, writing in 1940, noted that, "Despite sixty years of discussion and a bulky literature the controversies that have raged round the meaning of the Oceanic term *mana* and its related concepts are still far from settled."³

In a more recent article, Smith has organized the *mana* debate into six main chronological periods, beginning with the missionary anthropologist Robert Henry Codrington (1891) and ending with those writing in the period 1936 to the present. For

¹ See for example Esau Tuza, "Spirits and Powers in Melanesia," in *Powers, Plumes and Piglets*, ed. Norman C Habel (Australia: Australian Association for the Study of Religions, 1979), 102; Ian A Hogbin, "Mana," *Oceania* VI, no. 3 (1936): 240-274; Fox, *The Threshold of the Pacific*, 251; Leslie Fugui and Simon Butu, "Religion," in *Ples Blong Yumi: Solomon Islands, the Past Four Thousand Years*, ed. Hugh Laracy (Suva: The University of the South Pacific, 1989), 78.

² Nigel Francis Kelaepa, "A Theology of Mana or a Theology of Vulnerability," *Melanesian Messenger*, May 2004, 12.

³ Raymond Firth, *Tikopia Ritual and Belief* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 174.

Smith, the result of this century-long debate has been a drama in which a word was transformed into an incarnate power only to be reduced to a word again.⁴

What is evident in this debate is the almost bewildering number of definitions that mainly expatriate writers have put forward for the term. These include *mana* as supernatural power or influence (Codrington), magical power or supernatural force (Marett), impersonal religious force (Durkheim), divine force (Handy), effective, miracle, authority, prestige (Tregear), true (Hocart and Burt), luck (Hogbin), “an invisible spiritual substance in which objects may be immersed” (Fox), to be powerful, to exercise force (Ivens) and even as an analogy to electricity (Handy and Driberg).⁵ The debate is further complicated by the difficulty of finding a definition that fits the concept exactly. Hubert and Mauss, for example, define *mana* as not only a force or being, but also as an action, quality and a state, meaning that *mana* can be a noun, adjective or verb.⁶

This grammatical confusion has, according to Firth, “been responsible for much laborious theorizing.”⁷ With all these definitions and differences of opinion among scholars, Firth has pointed out what he sees as the key question in determining the nature of *mana*, namely whether an object is *mana* or has *mana*.⁸ This question and its implications are found in two very different assessments of *mana* by Codrington and Keesing. Looking at both in detail will help to clarify the issue further.

1.1 Codrington

The classic and most well known definition of *mana* is found in the writing of Robert Henry Codrington. He first mentions the concept in a letter to the anthropologist Max

⁴ Jonathan Z Smith, “Manna, mana everywhere and....” in *Radical Interpretation in Religion*, ed. Nancy K Frankenberry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 199.

⁵ See Firth, *Tikopia Ritual and Belief*, 175; Burt, *Tradition & Christianity: The Colonial Transformation of a Solomon Islands Society*, 54; Fox, *The Threshold of the Pacific*, 251.

⁶ Cited in Firth, *Tikopia Ritual and Belief*, 175. See also Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, trans. Robert Brain (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 108-112. In addition to these definitions, there are many descriptions of *mana* in the local Melanesian languages that provide even more topic for discussion. These will be examined in due course.

⁷ Firth, *Tikopia Ritual and Belief*, 175.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Müller (July 7th 1877) and develops his definition further in “*The Melanesians, Studies in their Anthropology and Folk-Lore*” (1891). In his view,

The Melanesian mind is entirely possessed by the belief in a supernatural power or influence, called almost universally ‘mana’. This is what works to affect everything which is beyond the ordinary power of men, outside the common processes of nature; it is present in the atmosphere of life, attaches itself to persons and to things, and is manifested by results which can only be ascribed to its operation.⁹

For Codrington, *mana* is power or influence (which can be supernatural), seen in practice, through the physical power of a man, or through his exhibiting of a particular power, excellence or skill.¹⁰ This *mana* is not fixed in anything, and can be conveyed in almost anything, but spirits-whether disembodied souls or supernatural beings-have it and can impart it, and it essentially belongs to personal beings to originate it, though it may act through the medium of water, or a stone or a bone.¹¹

This assessment of *mana* is subject to a great deal of debate. In particular our attention is drawn towards the following: First, Codrington’s research is based on observations and enquiries made partly in the Melanesian islands and more substantially from Norfolk Island among Melanesians taken there for schooling by the Melanesian Mission. Informants included students from the Banks Islands of Vanuatu and the Islands of Santa Isabel, Gela, Santa Cruz and Sa’a, a southern part of Malaita, Solomon Islands. The issue here is how much of what Codrington describes from the accounts of Melanesians taken out of their own contexts, actually corresponds to how *mana* operates back in Melanesia. Firth, for example, notes how Codrington’s exposition was not based on examples which he actually recorded or observed, rather he composed examples to illustrate his theory. Firth is doubtful whether a Melanesian in his own context would think of *mana* or approach it in the way that Codrington describes.¹²

Secondly, in his letter to Max Müller, Codrington describes *mana* as a word common to the whole Pacific and claims that people have tried very hard to describe what it is in

⁹ Codrington, *The Melanesians, Studies in Their Anthropology and Folk-Lore*, 118-119.

¹⁰ I will be using the term “men” throughout this paper, simply because in most of Melanesia, religious rites, sacrifice and accumulation of *mana* was confined to men. Women were often excluded.

¹¹ Codrington, *The Melanesians, Studies in Their Anthropology and Folk-Lore*, 119.

¹² Firth, *Tikopia Ritual and Belief*, 178.

different regions.¹³ There was an assumption from Codrington's time onwards that *mana* was a universal concept among Pacific peoples, strengthened, for example, by the publishing of Treager's *Maori-Polynesian Comparative Dictionary* which offered definitions of *mana* in ten Pacific Island languages (published the same year as Codrington's book) and the work of ethnographers among Native American people who identified what they saw as similar concepts to *mana*.¹⁴

This apparent similarity led to some scholars arguing that not only was *mana* a universal concept, but that it could become a foundation for a general theory of magic.¹⁵ This, comments Firth, was the result of Codrington's very general definition of *mana* that "promoted much theoretical speculation without leading to empirical research."¹⁶ The anthropologist Hogbin, while agreeing with many of Codrington's findings, concludes that *mana* is not a universal concept. Based on his study of the Polynesian people of Ontong Java in Solomon Islands and the people of Wogeo, from the Schouten Islands of Indonesia (Papua) he concluded that the concept of *mana* was conspicuously lacking in both cultures, implying that *mana* is by no means universal and cannot therefore be used as a foundation for a general theory of primal religions applicable to all Pacific cultures and regions.¹⁷

Thirdly, while Codrington does refer to *mana* as both a substantive noun and a transitive verb, it is his definition of *mana* as a kind of invisible medium of power that is subject to much criticism. The anthropologist Roger Keesing in particular, claims that the Codringtonian view of *mana* rests on very insecure ethnographic foundations. He argues that this particular view of *mana* was simply an invention of nineteenth century Europeans drawing upon their own cultural metaphors of power and the theories of nineteenth century physics.¹⁸ For Keesing, the main error lay in considering *mana* to be some sort of universal substance or medium of power or success. This did not take account of the diversity of the concept "in that different ancestors or gods conveyed different powers to different people in different (though unknown) ways." Essentially,

¹³ Codrington, *The Melanesians, Studies in Their Anthropology and Folk-Lore*, 119.

¹⁴ Smith, "Manna, mana everywhere and..." 199-200.

¹⁵ See for example Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 108-121; Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (New York: The Free Press, 1965), 222-223.

¹⁶ Raymond Firth, "Mana," in *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Chicago: William Benton, 1971), 746.

¹⁷ Hogbin, "Mana," 274.

¹⁸ Roger Keesing, "Rethinking Mana," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 40 (1984): 148.

Europeans, influenced by their own conventional metaphors of power and the notion of a universally explained cosmos, generalized the mana concept to fit their own worldview.¹⁹ The conventional metaphors of power referred to here are those that refer to “power” as if it were a quantifiable entity, a “thing” people have more or less of, someone who has “it” is powerful, “full of it”.²⁰

For Keesing, mana can be metaphorically “substantivized.” A magical stone may have mana, but the idea that the stone “contains” some invisible medium of power is erroneous.²¹ To illustrate this point he refers to Fox’s description of *mena* (mana) in the Arosi culture of Makira in Solomon Islands. Fox described it as “an invisible spiritual substance in which objects may be immersed...A great warrior is seen to have mena and all his possessions are soaked in it, so his club is treasured and handed down...certain places are impregnated with mena.”²²

Keesing’s assessment of such a definition is that it seems to be “analytically equivalent to inferring that the Pope’s crucifix is soaked in sanctity and a rabbit’s foot is soaked in good luck.”²³

MacClancy, an anthropologist writing on *mana* in the Vanuatu context, appears to affirm Keesing’s criticisms. He argues that Codrington’s understanding of *mana* is only one specific example of a general class of terms found throughout Vanuatu and translated into Bislama (Vanuatu pijin) as *strong* or *paoa*.²⁴ He argues that these terms are more often used in their stative, rather than substantive forms, and do not imply a substance. He concludes, “whether or not a mana notion denotes a substance is a matter for ethnographic investigation, and none of the more recent studies in Vanuatu suggests that such substance is believed to exist.”²⁵

What seems clear in this debate is that Codrington’s initial findings appear to be problematic and his modern critics, albeit with the significant advantage of

¹⁹ Ibid., 150.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 150. The original quotation can be found in Fox, *The Threshold of the Pacific*, 251-252.

²³ Keesing, "Rethinking Mana," 150.

²⁴ Jeremy MacClancy, "Mana: An Anthropological Metaphor for Island Melanesia," *Oceania* 57 (1986): 142.

²⁵ Ibid., 151.

ethnographic and linguistic knowledge of Oceanic languages unavailable to him, are pointing towards an alternative definition of mana.

Firth in his assessment of the mana debate notes significant difficulties with many of the different definitions put forward (including Codrington's). He notes that those studying *mana* have arrived at their results using the following three methods.

1. By attempting an exact "translation" of the word concerned and trying to get a precise verbal equivalent for the native idea.
2. By examining the relationship in native thought between the "*mana*-idea" and other concepts of the same native community by obtaining linguistic explanations of the "*mana*-concept" from the natives themselves.
3. By studying the actual usage of the word as employed in the course of normal behaviour and activities, and obtaining native linguistic comments on such usages.²⁶

For Firth, there is difficulty in finding any reliable, empirical data in the last two categories which "makes it inevitable that nearly all armchair discussion has centred round the dictionary definitions supplied by the first category." The results, he argues, have been unfortunate."²⁷

In other words, many of the attempts to define mana are based on the idea of finding some kind of European verbal equivalent or exact translation of the term. This attempt is the cause of much confusion. Mauss's definition of mana as force, action, quality and state and MacClancy's criticism of Codrington identifying only one particular form of a set of terms in the Vanuatu context are examples that seem to suggest that there is no exact equivalent and the attempt to find one is almost impossible. Williams, writing about *mana* in the Polynesian context questions whether we can speak of any concept of mana at all. The beliefs, customs and usages connected to the term are so diverse that any attempt to formulate definitions to cover all of them would only succeed in

²⁶ Firth, *Tikopia Ritual and Belief*, 174.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

describing general characteristics of any human culture.²⁸ While Williams is pointing out the immense diversity and difficulty of defining *mana* in a Polynesian context it seems that this difficulty is also true in the Melanesian context making the attempt to find an exact, or universal translation of the term almost impossible.

1.2 Keesing — Mana as Verb

In his chronological ordering of the *mana* debate, Smith highlights the period 1936 to the present as a period in which scholars have cast doubts over the value of depicting *mana* as a generic concept. Rather they have concentrated on analysing its specific meaning in particular cultures. The result has been a conviction that earlier accounts of *mana* have misunderstood its grammatical status. *Mana* is not most commonly a substantive noun naming an impersonal force that has been common in the literature since Codrington, but rather functions largely as a transitive stative verb. This critical process began with Hogbin (1936), Capell (1938), Firth (1940), and has culminated, for the present, in the work of Keesing (1984).²⁹

Codrington's view of *mana* is challenged by Keesing who bases his own fieldwork among the Kwaio people of Malaita, Solomon Islands. From his observations, *mana* in the Kwaio language operates as a stative (a verb translatable with an English adjective: something is *mana*) and as a verb, an ancestor or spirit "*mana-s*" someone. When the ancestor spirits (*adalo*) are pleased with the living they *nanama-ize* them (*nanama* being the local language term for *mana*) and when a priest sacrifices in a shrine and prays to the spirits, he asks them to *nanama-ize* us.³⁰

The critical issue here is that, according to Keesing, the Kwaio do not know how the *adalo nanama-ize* them but it is not a question of ancestors adding some magical or mystical ingredient or invisible agent of potency to the affairs of human beings. Neither is it a question of ancestors manipulating the lives of human beings in a positive direction. Rather, it is more a question of ancestors watching over human beings and

²⁸ Robert W Williamson, *Essays in Polynesian Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), 264-265.

²⁹ Smith, "Manna, mana everywhere and..." 201; Hogbin, "Mana," 266-268; A Capell, "The Word Mana: A Linguistic Study," *Oceania*, no. 9 (1938): 89-96; Firth, *Tikopia Ritual and Belief*, 174-179; Keesing, "Rethinking Mana," 137-156.

³⁰ Keesing, *Kwaio Religion: The Living and the Dead in a Solomon Island Society*, 46.

their efforts to allow their natural fulfilment. It is, for example, the nature of children, pigs or crops to grow well and quickly to maturity and unless an outside agent disrupts this process, the protection of the *adalo* ensures that this process is fulfilled.³¹

Mana, in this sense, is a form of protection against disruptive forces and not a substance or form of power that is given. The Kwaio also use *nanama* as a stative verb, for example if magic works, it is *nanama* (efficacious) and if divination is correct it is *nanama* (confirmed). If magic is powerful then it is *nanama* (true or efficacious).³² This seems to correspond to the anthropologist Burt's, fieldwork among the Kwara'ae people of Malaita who use the local term "*mamana*" (mana) to mean "true" as reality, veracity and also as effective and faithful. For Burt, the Kwara'ae seem less concerned with "power" as a thing in itself but more as a feature of their relationship with ghosts or spirits. Ghosts are referred to more as *mamana* and less so as having "power".³³

In his article, "*Rethinking Mana*", Keesing develops an explicit argument based on linguistic evidence that mana is primarily a stative verb and not a noun, "things and human enterprises and efforts *are* mana". *Mana* can also be a transitive verb, "ancestors and gods manaize people and their efforts".³⁴ Where *mana* is used as a noun it is as an abstract verbal noun denoting the state or quality of mana-ness or being *mana*. "Mana-ness is a state of efficacy, success, truth, potency, blessing, luck, realization—an abstract state or quality, not an invisible spiritual substance."³⁵ Keesing supports this argument by an examination of the term *mana* in a number of Melanesian languages. For example:

Malaita (Solomon Islands)

<u>To'abaita:</u>	<i>mamana</i>	Be true, real, fulfilled
		Be successful
		Impart spiritual or magical power
	<i>mamana-a</i>	Blessing, prosperity

³¹ Ibid., 47.

³² Ibid.

³³ Burt, *Tradition & Christianity: The Colonial Transformation of a Solomon Islands Society*, 54.

³⁴ Keesing, "Rethinking Mana," 138.

³⁵ Ibid. Dureau, writing more recently, has claimed that Keesings findings are supported by her own fieldwork among the Simbo people of the Western Solomon Islands. See Christine Dureau, "Skulls, Mana and Causality," *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 109, no. 1 (2000): 86.

Ancestrally conferred power

<u>Lau:</u>	<i>mamana</i>	Be efficacious, (of medicine); grow well, (of trees) Be good, of news; be prosperous, lucky, in good health, Be true, come true, be fulfilled Impart spiritual or magical power Of ghost, empower (a person)
	<i>manana-a</i>	Spiritual or magical power
	<i>mamana-laa</i>	Good health, good luck, success, truth

<u>Baegu:</u>	<i>mamana</i>	Be holy, true, effective
	<i>mamana-a</i>	Blessing, efficacy, power

<u>Kwaio</u>	<i>nanama</i>	Be effective, fulfilled, confirmed, realized; “work”
	<i>nanama-ngaa</i>	Protection, efficacy, good luck, blessing, success, Realization, conveying of protection

<u>Are'are</u>	<i>nanama</i>	Be strong, powerful, in metaphysical sense
	<i>nanama-ha</i>	Spiritual power
	<i>nanama'ini</i>	Give power, empower, of ghostly action

<u>Sa'a</u>	<i>nanama</i>	Be powerful
	<i>nanama'ini</i>	To put power into
	<i>nanama-nga</i>	Power

Western Solomons

<u>Roviana</u>	<i>mana</i>	Be potent, effectual
	<i>m-in-ana</i>	A blessing, mananess, efficacy, potency

Guadalcanal

<u>Longuu</u>	<i>nanama</i>	Be powerful
	<i>nanama-ni</i>	Empower

nanama Power.

Central Solomon Islands

<u>Gela</u>	<i>mana</i>	Be efficacious, from spiritual power, obtained from charms Efficacy, success, power, authority Prayers, intercourse with ancestors or spirits
	<i>mana-ngi</i>	To make successful, efficient, to empower, authorize To rule over; to put to rights, clear up ³⁶

From these examples, and others from the Pacific region, Keesing argues that the concept of *mana* needs to be re-examined. He suggests that a minimal first step towards a hermeneutic reinterpretation of *mana* would be to reinterpret *mana* from being potency to *mana* being potent, this process would then be repeated with other descriptions of *mana*, (true and truth, effective and efficacy, realized and realization) and so on.³⁷

1.3 Mana: An Anthropological Invention?

Keesing's work is of great significance to the *mana* debate because he highlights once again the complexities of the issue. It is also a view which questions Codrington's approach and by definition the scholars who have followed it. Burt notes that the use of *mana* by the Kwara'ae alone "throws serious doubt on the way many writers, mission scholars and anthropologists, Solomon Islanders and Europeans, uncritically follow Codrington in treating *mana* as a concept of spiritual power".³⁸ Examples, he cites, include Tippett (1967), Whiteman (1983), Fugui (1989) and White. (1991)³⁹. The question of how these works need to be seen in the light of Keesing's reinterpretation is a question to keep in mind as I explore the *mana* concept further.

³⁶ Keesing, "Rethinking Mana," 140-143.

³⁷ Ibid., 151.

³⁸ Burt, *Tradition & Christianity: The Colonial Transformation of a Solomon Islands Society*, 54.

³⁹ Ibid. See Tippett, *Solomon Islands Christianity: A Study in Growth and Obstruction*, 4-16; Fugui and Butu, "Religion," 78-79; Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 72-79; Geoffrey M White, *Identities through History: Living Stories in a Solomon Islands Society*, Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 38.

In addition, the existence of mana is measured by the success of a person or on results obtained, meaning that *mana* to a Melanesian is not a highly abstract or philosophical concept. From his research on New Georgia and Choiseul in Solomon Islands, Tuza, a Melanesian theologian, claims that people have no definite belief about the source of *mana*. This (he claims) may be because there is no created doctrinal system and people have not really explored the issue of its source. He observes that, "In the majority of cases, informants stated that mana happens because *mana* exists. In other words, they have accepted its operations but not theorised about its origins".⁴⁰ This appears to be the case in other parts of Melanesia.⁴¹ Hogbin, for example, comes to a similar conclusion on Guadalcanal, noting that, "Nobody knows how *nanama* works, and I gathered that the thought had never occurred to anyone before I made enquiries. The only answer to my questions was that this was a matter about which only the spirits themselves had information"⁴²

This is significant because not only does it make any analysis of *mana* far more difficult, but it also raises again the Codrington and Keesing debate. How much of what European anthropologists write about mana really applies to the Melanesian situation and how much of it is metaphysical speculation or invention? Whiteman, aware of this problem, argues that, "Western scholars...have made far more of it [*mana*] philosophically and intellectually than would Melanesians".⁴³ The Melanesian theologian, Apea, goes further, boldly stating, "foreign anthropologists are superficially explaining something which may not have been there".⁴⁴

Firth offers another word of warning, describing *mana* as a technical term of anthropology and consequently "may have little in common with the same term as used in native phraseology".⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Tuza, "Spirits and Powers in Melanesia," 103-104.

⁴¹ Refer to the difficulties, outlined in the previous chapter, of anthropologists trying to understand Melanesian customs.

⁴² Hogbin, "Mana," 245. Similar conclusions can be found in Keesing's work among the Kwaio. See Keesing, *Kwaio Religion: The Living and the Dead in a Solomon Island Society*, 48.

⁴³ Darrell Whiteman, "Melanesian Religions: An Overview," in *An Introduction to Melanesian Religions*, ed. Ennio Mantovani, *Point Series No. 6* (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1984), 100.

⁴⁴ Simon Apea, "Footprints of God in Ialibu," in *Living Theology in Melanesia: A Reader*, ed. John D'Arcy May, *Point Series No. 8* (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1985), 236.

⁴⁵ Firth, *Tikopia Ritual and Belief*, 177.

Perhaps, as Keesing claims, the real problem here is that scholars and anthropologists, when faced with a somewhat pragmatic philosophy of *mana* with very little metaphysical framework, have constructed a coherent and systematic philosophy/theology based not on Melanesian logic, but European.⁴⁶ What are we to make of this? Burt is in no doubt, “mission research often relies upon questionable anthropological stereotypes of Melanesian culture perpetuated from Codrington’s time, which inevitably distort its analysis of both traditional religion and local Christianity”.⁴⁷

Such a statement raises questions over how we should interpret the work of Codrington and those who follow his interpretation of *mana*. Is the *mana* they write about really the *mana* used, practised and applied by Melanesians? How much of it is really the *mana* of the Melanesians and how much is the *mana* of the anthropologist? Keesing’s view of *mana* may appear closer to grasping the concept and its use, but it still remains the view of an anthropologist determined by European categories and constructs interpreting Melanesian terms. Moreover, the *mana* concept that anthropologists describe is incredibly diverse and operates across numerous Melanesian cultures, but those cultures do not exist in isolation of each other either. The culture contact and change existing between Melanesian cultures before European contact, alluded to in Whiteman, would imply that diverse *mana* concepts have interacted, meaning that even one examination of *mana* from a specific Melanesian culture is likely to be describing a “*mana*” which, in its interaction with the other forms and interpretations of *mana* present in Melanesia, is more of a cultural synthesis rather than a “pure” interpretation of a single culture.

The European anthropologist is therefore faced not only with the danger of interpreting *mana* through a European cultural and metaphysical framework but also of assuming the *mana* he or she describes is unique to a specific culture. The interaction of Melanesian cultures with each other and with European cultures, and the versions of Christianity they introduced, would seem to make any such assumptions at best problematic and at worst misleading. It would also seem to suggest that any similarities between *mana* concepts across Melanesia are likely to be heightened by increasing culture contact and inter-change between Melanesian cultures.

⁴⁶ Keesing, *Kwaio Religion: The Living and the Dead in a Solomon Island Society*, 48.

⁴⁷ Burt, *Tradition & Christianity: The Colonial Transformation of a Solomon Islands Society*, 10.

2. *Mana and Melanesian Worldviews*

Whichever definition of *mana* we choose, we will come to the same conclusion that it is fundamental to Melanesian life in all its totality. Any analysis of *mana* needs to be done not in isolation of, but interconnected to, the key Melanesian concepts of community, relationships and exchange prominent in Melanesian worldviews.⁴⁸ It is part of the all-embracing Melanesian worldview. In order for a person to have *mana* or be *manaized* by the spirits, he must gain the spirits' favour. This is possible through the maintenance of right relationships and obligations within the community context. *Mana* is part of the relationship process bound up in the rights and duties, expectations and obligations, and relationships with the ancestral spirits and the living. *Mana* then forms an essential component of what Mantovani calls "fullness of life". This fullness of life operates in community through the fulfilment of one's obligations and maintenance of right relationships with relatives, ancestors and the environment. If these relationships are maintained then the person and community will enjoy the benefit, protection and success that *mana* brings. Likewise, if these relationships are not maintained then *mana* will not be present and active within the family or the wider community.

According to the missionary anthropologist Tippet, the Melanesian lived in a world of continual encounter. He was faced with practical needs that his religion satisfied. Such needs referred to the necessities of life, food production, fishing trade and exchange, communal cohesion, security and so on. *Mana* is needed in order to achieve and satisfy such needs. Similarly in order to avoid danger, failure, jealousies, hostile magic and so on, the Melanesian again called upon *mana* for protection. In the case of protection from hostile magic, a stronger *mana* was needed in order to defeat the *mana* of the magic used, thus there was a power encounter or confrontation between a *mana* that protects and a hostile *mana* that harms.⁴⁹

When giving an overview of Melanesian religions, Whiteman claims that Melanesian worldviews are generally divided into two parts:

⁴⁸ As outlined in Chapter 1.

⁴⁹ Tippet, *Solomon Islands Christianity: A Study in Growth and Obstruction*, 6.

1. The empirical (the natural environment, its economic resources, animals and humans, things which we can touch and see).
2. The non-empirical (spirit beings, occult forces, and the supernatural).⁵⁰

In such a worldview, the supernatural is closely connected to the natural empirical world. The gods, ghosts and spirits of the supernatural are believed to live on the earth (in pools, rivers, caves, or mountain tops for example) and near to human beings. Consequently, there is much interaction between the natural and the supernatural, to such an extent that the supernatural does at times become part of the natural. There is constant encounter between the two worlds. The spirits are not transcendent, but are constantly mingling with humans within the empirical world. This means that there can be no real separation of natural and supernatural, the two are in constant encounter. This would partly explain why Codrington refers to *mana* as “in a way supernatural”.⁵¹

The spirits, ghosts and ancestral spirits are all around human beings. There can be no real separation of sacred and profane or spiritual and secular, so much so that daily tasks such as growing crops, fishing, or general health and well-being, involve interaction with the supernatural. In order to be successful in these tasks, one will be in encounter with the non-empirical world, or one will at least be attempting to be so by trying to acquire *mana* for a successful outcome.

It is possible, then, to describe *mana* as a form of power, but Tuza makes a distinction between the two. He notes that in Bambatana language in Choiseul, power is called *karaputu* and in Roviana language, New Georgia, *ninivanira*. Both refer to “physical strength or force in the accomplishment of extra-ordinary activities”.⁵² Power in this sense refers to a man lifting a heavy object or a wind destroying a house or a great flood. If a person is physically strong, then he has power (*karaputa* or *niniranira*), but this is not the same as *mana*. While *mana* can include manifestations of physical strength it is often spoken of in terms of the impact made on human beings and its sources.⁵³ He uses the following example to illustrate the point:

⁵⁰ Whiteman, "Melanesian Religions: An Overview," 88-89.

⁵¹ Codrington, *The Melanesians, Studies in Their Anthropology and Folk-Lore*, 119.

⁵² Tuza, "Spirits and Powers in Melanesia," 102.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Suppose you came across a dead tree that suddenly falls and almost hits you in the face. You were missed by inches! Mana is not spoken of as some power or person felling the dead tree, but rather as the force that directs the tree to 'miss' you and so save you! In this sense, physical strength is not related to how the tree fell or to the force behind the tree that caused it to fall; rather it is connected with the force that directs the tree to miss you.⁵⁴

In this sense, mana is comparable to good fortune or even the Western concept of "luck". In Melanesian societies, however, nothing happens without a cause. The tree narrowly missing a person is not really coincidence or luck, but good fortune from having *mana*.⁵⁵ *Mana* in this particular instance does appear to be closer to a type of blessing or even, as Hogbin contends, as a form of luck.

2.1 Access to and Human Involvement with Mana

Tuza outlines three ways in which *mana* is involved with human beings: The first is determined by a person's own skills or gifts in life. *Mana* can be part of a person, inseparable from his or her nature. A person can be born with *mana*, or it can transfer from father to son or from an older person to a younger. Here there is a distinction between technical skills or gifts and *mana*. These skills are practical skills, but when handed down or transferred from one person to another, then it is referred to as giving *mana*.⁵⁶ According to Tuza, such transference involves the performing of certain rituals such as the eating together of specific herbal medicines or involves special words spoken by the person transferring *mana*. It may also involve the showing of secret places where *mana* can be obtained. Often the transference of *mana* would take place when a person with *mana* learns he is dying.⁵⁷ A similar idea is found in Fox's assessment of *mena* (mana) in Makira, Solomon Islands, in that the club of a great warrior is treasured and handed down, because it contains *mena*. Forms of words also contain *mena* and certain places are impregnated with it.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 105. A similar conclusion is found in Hogbin, "Mana," 265; Hogbin, *A Guadalcanal Society: The Kaoka Speakers*, 88.

⁵⁶ Tuza, "Spirits and Powers in Melanesia," 104.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Fox, *The Threshold of the Pacific*, 252.

Secondly *mana* is something given from the supernatural world, not because of human effort, but one can be blessed by *mana*.⁵⁹ Again this brings us close to the concept of good fortune and luck. Indeed the words *mana* (in Bambatana) and *minana* (in Roviana) have connotations of good fortune. They are also associated with words such as *sigaro* (be wholesome); *kuo vasasapu* (stay well without sickness); and *makaolo* (be fortunate in all that you would want to do and be prosperous in wealth and food).⁶⁰

Hogbin's analysis of peoples from the Koaka area of Guadalcanal and the To'abaitan people of Malaita both show a similar concept. In Guadalcanal *nanama* (*mana*) is given to humans by the spirits and, as a result, they will prosper. If however the *nanama* is withheld then the opposite will be true, the person will not prosper and will be unsuccessful. In this context the affairs of the living are believed to prosper only by virtue of the *nanama* which the spirits exert on their behalf. The success of one person and the failure of another are attributed to the spirits using *nanama* to favour the one and at the same time withholding it from the other.⁶¹

Among the To'abaitan people of Malaita, spirits possess *mamanaa* (*mana*), a supernatural power. A successful man in the community would have *mamanaa* or be *mamanaa* (the word acting as both a noun and verb). In this case, he is favoured or blessed by the spirits. Again, as on Guadalcanal, unless a man is blessed or favoured by the spirits he will never be successful.⁶²

Importantly, however, human beings do not generate *mana*; it is always given by ancestors or spirits. Even in Tuza's first category of men being born with *mana* and transferring it to another, the *mana* still originates from the ancestral spirits. Hogbin picks up this point when he asked Melanesians from the Koaka region, "What does it mean to have *nanama*?" The reply was an "explanation that the spirits had advanced the man's interests...A man has no power of his own and has to rely on what the spirits will do for him...To have *nanama* means to be successful, through the favour of the spirits".⁶³

⁵⁹ Tuza, "Spirits and Powers in Melanesia," 104.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 102-103.

⁶¹ Hogbin, "Mana," 244.

⁶² Ibid., 259.

⁶³ Ibid., 244-245.

The interaction between men and spirits also means that the *mana* of a person does not stop after death. When a person who has *mana*, such as a chief or warrior, dies, his influence will remain strong over the living and his *mana* can be acquired and used.⁶⁴ Tippett observes that there is a widespread readiness to call on the ghosts of the dead and particularly those remembered for their skill or prowess in a specific area of life. Those who were famous as warriors, gardeners, fishermen, magicians and so on would be called on to supply *mana* with respect to those proficiencies.⁶⁵

This is one reason why, for example, ancestral ghosts were worshipped and the ancestral skull(s) kept by each household. It was a repository of *mana*—to be drawn on for “profit, protection or proficiency”.⁶⁶ Often villages would have a sacred place or building to keep skulls and *mana* could be stored and accumulated. For example, the *mana* of a warrior could be stored in some kind of repository such as an amulet, a stone worn around the neck, a tuft of leaves in the belt, a tooth hung on the finger of the warrior’s spear hand, or in the form of ritual words. Upon his death, the *mana* belongs to his ghost but could be activated and used by another person.⁶⁷

The third way *mana* interacts with human beings is through sacrifice and ritual, a good example being Tuza’s illustration of the *sope* ritual of Choiseul.⁶⁸ A *sope* is a hut that contains the skulls and bones of chiefs, warriors, wise men and other people with distinguished roles in the society. The ritual involves the “recalling” of ancestral *mana* to operate among the living, through a burnt sacrifice of taro and pudding. The purpose of this ritual then, is to make the *mana* of the ancestor’s operative.⁶⁹

Hogbin describes a similar concept in his account of sacrifice on Guadalcanal. Here sacrifices were offered to the spirits of distinguished people in the community, ancestors and clan spirits, so that the spirits’ *nanama* would work in their favour. He also notes other sacrifices made to shark and snake spirits, with the same purpose, to secure the favour of the spirits, to bestow *nanama* for good crops and success in gardening, fishing

⁶⁴ Tuza, "Spirits and Powers in Melanesia," 103.

⁶⁵ Tippett, *Solomon Islands Christianity: A Study in Growth and Obstruction*, 4.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 5.

⁶⁸ Tuza, "Spirits and Powers in Melanesia," 105-106; Trompf, *Payback: The Logic of Retribution in Melanesian Religions*, 119.

⁶⁹ Tuza, "Spirits and Powers in Melanesia," 105-106.

and sailing.⁷⁰ He identifies similar concepts in his account of Malaita.⁷¹ In both Guadalcanal and Malaita, Hogbin also mentions the work of specialist priests who could access *mana* through sacrificial rituals to secure the assistance of ancestral spirits and White observes similar concepts on Santa Isabel. Such priests were both respected and feared for their ability to acquire *mana* and determine the course of events, the power of this *mana* being demonstrated primarily through success in worldly affairs.⁷²

According to Tippet, *mana* could also be acquired from the skulls of one's enemies. This was a major reason for head-hunting—to collect skulls and build up the tribal supply of *mana*. The heads of one's enemies were offerings presented to the ancestral skulls to build up *mana*. They were also collected for numerous special occasions such as the building of a canoe house, the launching of a war canoe, or the opening of a ceremonial house.⁷³ In a similar way, Tippet claims that the practice of cannibalism was designed to build up *mana*. Tribal enemies were eaten to obtain their strength and *mana* both at a personal level (the individual warrior, building up his own supply to increase fighting ability) and collectively as a tribe.⁷⁴ This also meant that by taking the *mana* of one's enemy, you succeeded in diminishing or reducing the enemy's supply of *mana*. Tippet also mentions there being a *mana* scale in operation on Malaita during the early days of the British Protectorate over Solomon Islands. People were effectively scaled and measured in terms of the *mana* they were believed to possess, from a pig (lowest) to a white-man (highest).⁷⁵

Yet the complexities of the *mana* debate surface again here. Recent anthropological writing has followed Keesing's criticism of writers such as Tippet portraying *mana* as some kind of measurable substance. Dureau and Aswani, for example, argue that head-hunting in Simbo and Roviana cultures of the Western Solomon Islands was not practised to take some kind of supernatural "life-force" or "soul-fluid" (*mana*) to build up the tribal supply, but rather to supernaturally deny the enemy access to *mana*. The

⁷⁰ Hogbin, "Mana," 251.

⁷¹ Ibid., 259-262. A similar concept is found in Fox's account of Makira in Fox, *The Threshold of the Pacific*, 114.

⁷² Hogbin, "Mana," 258-261; Geoffrey White, "War, Peace and Piety in Santa Isabel, Solomon Islands," in *The Pacification of Melanesia, ASAO Monograph No. 7* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1979), 115.

⁷³ Tippet, *Solomon Islands Christianity: A Study in Growth and Obstruction*, 7.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

keeping of ancestral skulls was a means to secure the *mana* of the ancestors through the skulls physical presence. However, the taking of enemy's heads was not to build up *mana* but rather to deny the enemies access to it by preventing the transformation of their dead into viable ancestors.⁷⁶ It not only succeeded in separating enemies from *mana* but, according to Dureau, created harmful forces within the enemy community by creating harmful endo-cannibalistic spirits. Denying enemy access to *mana* was to deny them access to essential survival and "life" within their own communities.⁷⁷ Such a view may cast doubt on Tippett's assertion that head-hunting was practised to build up the tribal supply of *mana*: instead it was a way of effectively disabling enemies; a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Yet despite the disparities we can still note that *mana* is fundamentally connected to "life": either it can be activated to secure "life" or it can be taken away to deny or prevent "life".

2.2 Mana Qualities/Characteristics

What, then, are the qualities or characteristics of a person endowed with *mana*? According to Tuza, such a person would stand out as an extraordinary individual with an impact or influence over others. Such persons could be warriors who lead their men to victory, wise men or ritual specialists able to propitiate the anger of the spirits.⁷⁸

Fugui, a Solomon Islander, defines *mana* as "a power which should facilitate the achievement of a wide range of individual and community purposes", adding that a leader endowed with *mana* would "demonstrate good leadership qualities and display both wisdom and love".⁷⁹ He would also possess holiness and righteousness and be able to uphold the moral standards of the society. *Mana* should also provide prosperity and wealth to persons so that they can share their wealth with the less well-off people in society.⁸⁰

Perhaps the simplest definition of a *mana* quality is success, a person with *mana* will be successful in whatever enterprise he undertakes. If he is a warrior he will succeed in

⁷⁶ See Dureau, "Skulls, Mana and Causality," 81-82; Shankar Aswani, "Changing Identities: Roviana Predatory Head-Hunting," *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 109, no. 1 (2000): 54-55.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Tuza, "Spirits and Powers in Melanesia," 103.

⁷⁹ Fugui and Butu, "Religion," 78.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

battle, if he is a fisherman he will catch many fish, if he plants crops he will produce a bumper harvest. Moreover he and his family will be healthy, free from sickness and from the effects of hostile magic. A person with *mana* will be successful at varying degrees of life. Not every one with *mana* will be a great leader or extraordinary individual but raising a healthy family free from sickness and with plenty to eat is also a sign of *mana* just as much as the leadership qualities of the extraordinary individual.

Mana interconnects with the everyday business of life and survival in a tribal society. *Mana* and the favour of the ancestors and spirits is greatly needed when faced with the harsh realities of life. A tribal community, when faced with inter-tribal warfare, the threat of hostile magic, sickness and death, and which relies totally on good weather conditions for food production, needs *mana* for day to day survival. *Mana* is an essential element to life itself and provides an explanatory framework for life's experiences. Death, disaster and success are all comparable within the *mana* concept.⁸¹

If *mana* produces success, then the proof that something has or is *mana* is based on whether that success is seen on results obtained, in other words, based on empirical proof. Codrington illustrates this by using the example of a man finding a stone of an unusual shape. In order to find out whether the stone has *mana* he lays it at the foot of a tree, the fruit of which may resemble its shape, or he buries it in his garden. A bumper crop on the tree or in his garden is proof that the stone is or has *mana*.⁸²

Success in any area of life is proof that a person has *mana*. For example, a man becomes a leader of his people, not generally by inheriting the role, but because he demonstrates empirically to his followers that he has the quality of *mana*. The connotation of *mana* with well-being and good fortune also implies that it is power to be used for the benefit of one's society or tribe. Whiteman claims that the essence of *mana* is effectively salvation for Melanesian communities, salvation here meaning an abundance of "life"

⁸¹ MacClancy, "Mana: An Anthropological Metaphor for Island Melanesia," 150. See also Keesing, "Rethinking Mana," 148. Here Keesing notes that *mana* as a concept addresses two circumstances of life among the early settlers of the Pacific. 1. The essential unpredictability of the outcomes of human effort in fishing, gardening, war, feast-giving, curing and so on. 2. Inequalities among humans in terms of their successes and failures.

⁸² Codrington, *The Melanesians, Studies in Their Anthropology and Folk-Lore*, 119.

and success in all possibilities of human life: without *mana* there is no “life” and hence no salvation.⁸³

3. *Mana and Christianity*

The interaction between various Melanesian cultures and worldviews is likely to have influenced how *mana* operated within those specific cultures. The coming of Christianity to Melanesia, however, meant an even more significant change as Melanesians interacted with the very different cultural and social worldviews of European missionaries and the European versions of Christianity they introduced. Hogbin’s research among the T’obaitans of Malaita, is a significant study of such interaction. He claims that the interaction between a Melanesian worldview and an introduced Christianity meant that the concept of *mamanaa* (*mana*) still existed, but now operated in a changed Christian context. *Mamanaa* was still available, but its source was now no longer the ancestral spirits of the community but rather the Christian God received and accepted by Melanesians. He particularly noted that Melanesian Christians were still using the same word *mamanaa* to describe God’s supernatural power and pray for essentially the same benefits as they did to the ancestral spirits.⁸⁴

Furthermore, Hogbin argued that failure to obey God’s rules given to humanity in Christian teaching such as the Ten Commandments, or the failure to obey the instructions of Christian teachers or to attend Church regularly, was believed to lead to God withholding his *mamanaa* and the “sinner” experiencing misfortune and sickness.⁸⁵ He observed a close parallel between the Christian and “heathen” attitudes towards confession. For example in the Melanesian Mission, the sinner confesses to the priest who then beseeches God to continue to exercise *mamanaa* on his behalf. Persistent good health would be a sign of God’s forgiveness.⁸⁶

Burt notes a similar occurrence among the Kwara’ae of Malaita in that the relationship between a person and God is similar to that of a person and the ghosts or spirits of the

⁸³ Whiteman, "Melanesian Religions: An Overview," 101.

⁸⁴ Hogbin, "Mana," 263.

⁸⁵ Hogbin, *Experiments in Civilisation: The Effects of European Culture on a Native Community of the Solomon Islands*, 191.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 192.

dead. God gives his support and protection (*mamana*) only to those whose lives are “clean” and who follow his rules.⁸⁷ The Kwara’ae term for *mana*, *mamana*, means, among other things, to be “true”, so that if one keeps God’s rules, one is being true to God, so that God will be “true” in return. God will bestow his protection and blessing, his *mamana*.⁸⁸

There are similarities here between the importance of relationship between humanity and spirits in pre-Christian religion and that of humanity and God in a Christian context. The interaction between Melanesian worldviews and Christianity has meant that as the Christian God has replaced the “heathen” gods, the concept of *mana* has remained, so that if one is in right relationship with God, then God will bestow his blessing and protection, his *mana*. As Phillip Udua explains, “If I really live for Christ and am true to Christ, well, my family lives well, my garden grows well, and everything else; perhaps I’ll get into some trouble, God will deliver me from it”.⁸⁹

However, as noted in Hogbin, once a person breaks God’s rules then it is believed God withdraws his *mamana* and a man or his family will experience sickness and misfortune. That relationship is only restored through confession of sin. The issue of relationship, a key concept identified by Mantovani, is also key in the Christian’s dealings with God. Sickness and misfortune, caused by the withdrawal of God’s *mana* is a direct result of the failure to keep God’s rules—it involves a broken relationship. This can also apply to one’s relationships to others in the community as well. For example, if someone is sick in a traditional Melanesian society, the relationships between the spirits, others in the community and the land will be checked to find which one is broken. A similar concept applies in the Christian context—the broken relationship has to be admitted and resolved through confession and forgiveness of sin. Only then will the sickness and misfortune cease.

MacClancy, writing in the Vanuatu context, argues that although European contact and the acceptance of Christianity has led to the introduction of new cultural concepts and new relationships, much is still analysed and interpreted in terms of *mana*-notions.

⁸⁷ Burt, *Tradition & Christianity: The Colonial Transformation of a Solomon Islands Society*, 258.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Cited in Ibid., 258.

Mana still occupies a central position functioning as a lens through which both old and new cultural concepts are interpreted.⁹⁰

These examples seem to show that while the Christian God has largely replaced traditional gods and spirits, issues of right relationships and *mana* remain with God functioning as the ultimate source of *mana*. In an article on Codrington, the historian Davidson makes the following point.

What Codrington does not explore is how far Christianity was seen as offering access to a new form of *mana*. Certainly the confusion between the Christian Gospel (i.e., the message) and the cultures brought by the missionaries (the medium, particularly their possessions) created considerable confusion as Melanesians sought the *mana* of the new teaching in order to acquire the *mana* of the material goods that would give them increased status in their own society.⁹¹

Davidson is drawing attention to the profound influence of Christianity on *mana*, so much so that Christianity itself is understood as a form of *mana*, stronger than traditional forms and in power encounter with them. Tippett argues that, as the Melanesian world is one of continual spirit and power encounter, the initial encounter between Christianity and traditional religions was not between the Christian God and a pagan deity—but instead took place at the level of spirit encounter in daily life.⁹² This encounter had to deal with relevant problems of gardening, war, fishing, security, food supply, health and so on. *Mana* was needed to ensure all of these, so the main issue for Melanesians converting to Christianity, was one of power in daily life.⁹³

This would suggest that Christianity was accepted by Melanesians on the basis of power. The Christian God as the ultimate source of *mana* was judged to be more powerful than the existing gods and spirits by demonstrating a superior *mana*. The demonstration of that *mana* was far more important to Melanesians than any philosophical or abstract notion of it and so Tippett argues that Christianity was

⁹⁰ MacClancy, "Mana: An Anthropological Metaphor for Island Melanesia," 149-150.

⁹¹ Allan K Davidson, "The Legacy of Robert Henry Codrington," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 27, no. 4 (2003): 175.

⁹² Tippett, *Solomon Islands Christianity: A Study in Growth and Obstruction*, 5.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

accepted into the islands on the basis of its power, not on the plausibility of any intellectual argument or logical proof. It was judged based on how powerful it was.⁹⁴

Tippett graphically illustrates this point by telling the story of a Christian teacher and thirty men cutting down a sacred banyan tree. As the tree was sacred and therefore *tabu* to touch, the belief among the local people was that they would die as a result. The tree was cut down and the men were unharmed. A cross was erected on the site and a Christian service held. While Christian missionaries may have interpreted this story as a debunking of the *tabu* concept, Tippett argues that this is a misunderstanding of both Melanesian logic and culture. A Melanesian interpretation of events would focus on why the *mana* of the tree failed to work. There would be at least two possible answers:

1. The sacrifices and rituals to maintain the *mana* of the tree had been neglected and forgotten.
2. The *mana* of the sacred tree was overcome by a greater *mana*. The teacher and the young axemen would in this case be seen to possess a Christian *mana* that was all-powerful. Two things ought to be noted: a. they claimed victory in the name of Christ, and b. they erected a cross, which, in the eyes of the villagers became a functional substitute for the tree, the symbol of power which claimed their allegiance.⁹⁵

In this instance, Tippett claims that Christianity was accepted because of its superior *mana*—the cross replaces the tree—but the Melanesian concept of power remains intact. Kelaepa expresses similar views, noting that a major reason for Melanesians accepting the Anglican Christianity of the Melanesian Mission was the issue of *mana*. The apparent fearlessness and determination of missionaries and the way they were able to enter custom houses, temples and shrines and destroy them without being struck down by the local gods and ancestral spirits was the demonstration of a superior *mana*. The transfer of allegiance to the Christian God would therefore allow for transference and receipt of a superior Christian *mana*. This, according to Kelaepa, meant two things. First, Melanesian Christians believe that God's *mana* or power is directly active in

⁹⁴ See Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 370-371, 409; Tippett, *Solomon Islands Christianity: A Study in Growth and Obstruction*, 100-111.

⁹⁵ Tippett, *Solomon Islands Christianity: A Study in Growth and Obstruction*, 101.

supernatural power encounters in the world and is superior to every other. Secondly, an allegiance to God would allow access to his *mana* which would bestow blessing, success, good fortune, effectively fullness of life. It would also mean that God's *mana* could be accessed ultimately to have control over one's life and the lives of others, both friend or foe.⁹⁶

In addition, Hogbin argues that the Christian God differed from traditional gods in two very fundamental ways:

1. Worship to ghosts, ancestral spirits and gods required material sacrifices such as pigs. In contrast, the rituals required by the Christian God were prayer and church worship and no such sacrifices. Christians can maintain a good relationship with God without the need for the kind of demanding sacrifices reserved for ghosts and ancestral spirits.
2. The Christian God offered the promise of "eternal life", which the ghosts did not. This, Hogbin claims, was a chief reason why people joined the Christian missions.⁹⁷

These differences only added to the conception that God was more powerful than traditional spirits, to the extent that Melanesians were confident enough to trust in this power to protect them against those spirits angry at their desertion of traditional ways by converting to Christianity. This is illustrated by one of MacClancy's informants:

If you want to leave customs you must go to church, you must read the Bible everyday, you must talk to God. If you merely leave custom, custom will kill you. But if you are faithful to one church, God will look after you. Custom won't be able to kill you.⁹⁸

All the writers in this section have identified how in the interaction between Melanesian cultures and Christianity some kind of synthesis has taken place where allegiances have shifted but key cultural concepts continue to operate in an altered context. The *mana* of ancestral spirits is superseded by the *mana* of the Christian God whose *mana* is

⁹⁶ Kelaepa, "A Theology of Mana or a Theology of Vulnerability," 12.

⁹⁷ Hogbin, *Experiments in Civilisation: The Effects of European Culture on a Native Community of the Solomon Islands*, 180-181.

⁹⁸ MacClancy, "Mana: An Anthropological Metaphor for Island Melanesia," 149.

available to those who follow him—a *mana* which can ensure blessing and success as long as relationships continue to be maintained with its source. In short, such *mana* is bestowed by God and can be directed by its adherents to ensure the protection and maintenance of life. It is this concept that becomes critical when, in the following chapters, we explore a specific example of this Melanesian/Christian interaction operating in the Melanesian Brotherhood.

4. Concluding Remarks

Mana is a highly ambiguous and generalized term, it describes power and influence as seen in leadership qualities, but can also describe proficiency in important daily tasks, such as fishing, growing crops and so on. It can also describe the “power” a warrior has to defeat his enemies. All of these refer to the protection and well-being of one’s community. *Mana* can also refer to the use of magic and sorcery directed against one’s enemies. Someone who has *mana* is able to direct the power of the spirits to bring success or to harm another. Yet, despite the difficulties surrounding attempts to define it and the major issues taking place in the various debates about it, my examination of how *mana* is perceived, used and applied in various Melanesian contexts has identified some important similarities. For example, its interconnection with the key concepts of community, relationships and exchange is common across Melanesia and its role in ensuring the continuing survival, protection and maintenance of life in communities is core to many Melanesian cultures. In addition, we have seen how anthropologists and other writers, working from various Melanesian contexts, highlight an explicit interaction between Melanesian cultures and Christianity, and how *mana* operates in an altered Christian context. This effectively lays the foundations for our examination of this Melanesian/Christian interaction and use of *mana* in a specific Melanesian context, namely within the Melanesian Brotherhood.

Chapter 3

The Melanesian Brotherhood

1. History

The Melanesian Brotherhood, an Anglican Religious Order of young men, was founded by a Solomon Islander, Ini Kopuria, in 1925. Its aim, according to Macdonald-Milne, was wholly evangelistic, with the primary task of evangelising areas and peoples as yet untouched by the Churches.¹ Described by Arbuckle as, “one of the most outstanding indigenous movements in the Christian Church throughout the Pacific”, it appears to have fulfilled the need for a home-grown or Melanesian approach to evangelisation.² So much so that it has become the largest Religious Order of young men, both in Melanesia, and within the Anglican Communion itself.³ In order to understand the reasons for its formation and its apparent success in Melanesia there is a need to assess the work of the Anglican Melanesian Mission and the difficulties it was encountering around the early 1920s.

¹ Brian Macdonald-Milne, an expatriate priest from England, worked in Solomon Islands from 1964-1978 and during that period was appointed chaplain to the Melanesian Brotherhood. Since retiring from that position, and returning to England in 1980, he has written three accounts of the Order. The first, *“Spearhead: The Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood”* (1981), is a brief account of the founding of the Order and its distinctive features. The second, *“The Melanesian Brotherhood and the Tradition of Indigenous Evangelism in the Anglican Church in the Pacific Islands”* (1999), was an article which largely drew on material from *“Spearhead”* but with a more specific focus on evangelism and the contribution of the Melanesian Brotherhood to the world-wide Church. More recently he has published *“The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000”*, a more detailed historical account of the Order. Despite being described in a recent book review as, “...having a detailed style which becomes somewhat tedious”, the reviewer highlighted it as “an important contribution to the history of mission in the Pacific.” See Geoff Smith, “The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000 by Brian Macdonald-Milne,” *South Pacific Journal of Mission Studies*, no. 34 (2005): 56. It is an important source and to date the only in depth historical account of the beginnings and development of the Melanesian Brotherhood. Drawing on a number of primary historical sources, it remains an authoritative secondary source frequently cited in this chapter. See Brian Macdonald-Milne, *Spearhead: The Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood* (Watford: The Melanesian Mission, 1981); Brian Macdonald-Milne, *The Melanesian Brotherhood and the Tradition of Indigenous Evangelism in the Anglican Church in the Pacific Islands*, The North Atlantic Missiology Project (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1999); Brian Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000* (Leicester: Christians Aware, 2003).

² Cited in Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 194.

³ This claim is made in Richard A Carter, “Where God Still Walks in the Garden: Religious Orders and the Development of the Anglican Church in the South Pacific,” in *Anglicanism: A Global Communion*, ed. Andrew Wingate, et al. (London: Mowbray, 1998), 45. A claim more recently supported in the worldwide Anglican Episcopal World Magazine. See Robert Moore and Gerald T Rayner, “The Melanesian Brotherhood,” *Anglican Episcopal World*, Trinitytide 2004, 14.

1.1 The Melanesian Mission

By the 1920s, the Melanesian Mission had moved its base of operations from Norfolk Island to Siota on Gela in the central Solomon Islands. The general policy of the Mission, established by its founder Bishop George Augustus Selwyn and the first Bishop of Melanesia John Coleridge Patteson, to train Melanesians to become evangelists of their own people, remained in effect but, according to Macdonald-Milne, there were significant problems with this policy.⁴ First, in certain areas, such as the Santa Cruz islands, there were very few young Melanesians coming forward for training, and those that were being trained tended to be from coastal areas and, “had no desire to work among people in the bush”, with whom the Mission had very little, or in most cases, no contact at all.⁵

Secondly, Munamua claims that the bush people remained inland for fear of head-hunting raids but, as the coastal peoples converted to Christianity, such raids began to cease and thus opened up opportunities for contact with those living inland in the bush and mountainous regions of the islands.⁶ The difficulty was who would carry out the evangelising? Those from the coastal areas had no desire to and it was generally believed that expatriate missionaries were “unsuited to the work”, particularly those who were married and who did not want to spend long periods away from the mission centres and their families. Moreover, many of them were involved with the running of already established educational institutions and in the supervision of Melanesian clergy and catechists.⁷

Thirdly, another difficulty was the outlying islands of the Solomons many of which were isolated and difficult to contact. Many of them were inhabited predominately by

⁴ See Macdonald-Milne, *Spearhead: The Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 6; Macdonald-Milne, *The Melanesian Brotherhood and the Tradition of Indigenous Evangelism in the Anglican Church in the Pacific Islands*, 5.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Lazarus Munamua, "The Brothers of the Church: A Story About the Development of the Melanesian Brotherhood" (L.Th. Thesis, Joint Board of Theological Studies, Auckland, 1983), 11. Munamua relies heavily on secondary historical sources such as Macdonald-Milne, Hilliard and Armstrong but is included here as one of the few Melanesian authors on the subject. He is also the former bishop of Temotu, which includes Santa Cruz, and his comments would seem to corroborate the views of expatriate historians.

⁷ Macdonald-Milne, *Spearhead: The Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 6; Macdonald-Milne, *The Melanesian Brotherhood and the Tradition of Indigenous Evangelism in the Anglican Church in the Pacific Islands*, 5. Such views are corroborated in other secondary sources. See Munamua, "The Brothers of the Church: A Story About the Development of the Melanesian Brotherhood", 11; W P Morrell, *The Anglican Church in New Zealand* (Dunedin: John McIndoe Limited, 1973), 198.

Polynesians, culturally different from Melanesians, which presented a new set of challenges.⁸

Finally, Hilliard argues that at the end of 1918, there was a feeling of crisis among the mission staff. In October of that year, staff had met and passed a vote of “dissatisfaction at the present working of the mission” and demanded that the bishop should in future “act on the advice of two counsellors, chosen from the staff”.⁹ The bishop in question, Cecil Wood, is described rather unflatteringly by Hilliard as a, “tactless, ivory tower theologian, who displayed no particular liking for missionary life as it was actually lived”.¹⁰ He proved to be unpopular principally because his mission staff resented being lectured to on the theory of mission by someone who failed to throw himself heart and soul into the district work.¹¹ Fox claims that the staff considered him doctrinaire and, “a theorist who did not understand what was practicable in Melanesia”.¹² Hilliard argues that Wood’s leadership failed to adapt to Melanesian conditions and, consequently, the pace of the Mission faltered.¹³ In many parts of the diocese, the number of Christian converts remained static or declined in number. In 1918, the overall number of converts throughout the diocese stood at 14,194, an increase of only 69 from the figures of 1910. The total number of village schools had dropped from 352 in 1910 to 318 in 1918. There were also fewer European staff working in the mission than 10 years previously and the number of active Melanesian clergy had only increased by two.¹⁴

⁸ Macdonald-Milne, *Spearhead: The Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 6; Macdonald-Milne, *The Melanesian Brotherhood and the Tradition of Indigenous Evangelism in the Anglican Church in the Pacific Islands*, 5.

⁹ David Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1978), 209-210. This is another important secondary source that draws heavily on primary historical sources and is one of the few historical studies of the Melanesian Mission in existence.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 208.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Charles Elliot Fox, *Lord of the Southern Isles: The Story of the Melanesian Mission* (London: A. R. Mowbray & Co Limited, 1958), 61. Charles Elliot Fox born in England and educated in New Zealand joined the Melanesian Mission in 1902, and while Headmaster at Pawa school on Makira, Ini Kopuria was among his pupils. In 1932 Fox joined the Melanesian Brotherhood, the first European ever to do so, until he was asked to leave by Bishop Baddeley in 1942. He did however rejoin in 1975 at the age of 97, while living in New Zealand. He died two years later and is buried at the Brotherhood’s headquarters at Tabalia on Guadalcanal. He is well known not only as a missionary but also as a linguist and anthropologist. For more information on Fox see Gerald H Anderson, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 220. Entry for Charles Elliot Fox.

¹³ Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 208.

¹⁴ Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 184-185; Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 208-209. Of course one factor which would affect the European staffing levels was the First World War, which would have made it far more difficult to recruit new members.

Confronted with the open rebellion and dissatisfaction of his staff, Wood resigned and was replaced by John Mainwaring Steward in September 1919.¹⁵

Faced with the new difficulties and challenges of mission work, expatriate missionaries began considering new strategies. One such strategy being the concept of a “Brotherhood” which would consist of, “men, unmarried and under a simple rule, who would go out in bands to non-Christian areas and give mutual support and encouragement to one another”.¹⁶ Such a strategy had in fact been considered by Steward who, while working on Guadalcanal, envisaged a group of priests in a semi-monastic Brotherhood living among the non-Christian bush people of Malaita with a view to converting them. In 1907 he asked the missionary Charles Fox to join but nothing ever eventuated.¹⁷ In 1910, on Santa Cruz, a number of priests and laymen formed the *Santa Cruz Brotherhood* with similar intentions to Steward, but it lasted for only 18 months.¹⁸

On Makira, Charles Fox, then headmaster of Pawa School, wanted to contact the hill villages of the island and, when faced with a shortage of teachers with whom to do so, instead formed a Brotherhood of young Melanesian men called the *St Aidan's Brotherhood*. Members took promises to receive no pay, remain unmarried and to go wherever they were sent. Led by a Head Brother, Ellison Kokou from Maravovo village on Guadalcanal, the Brothers went two by two into the bush villages for two months at a time, before returning to the mission headquarters for one month of teaching and then returning to the villages and so on. The movement however, did not last long. Fox

¹⁵ Steward had worked in the islands since 1902 and had been a leading figure in the rebellion against Bishop Wood. His appointment was quite different from the established practice of delegating the right of nomination to outsiders. See Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 214.

¹⁶ Macdonald-Milne, *Spearhead: The Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 6; Macdonald-Milne, *The Melanesian Brotherhood and the Tradition of Indigenous Evangelism in the Anglican Church in the Pacific Islands*, 5.

¹⁷ Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 227; Macdonald-Milne, *Spearhead: The Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood*; Macdonald-Milne, *The Melanesian Brotherhood and the Tradition of Indigenous Evangelism in the Anglican Church in the Pacific Islands*, 5; Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 32. Fox himself refers to the offer to join in Fox, *Kakamora*, 68.

¹⁸ Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 32. Here he refers to the movement as “The Santa Cruz Brotherhood” but in earlier works he describes it as “The Litchfield Brotherhood” named after the Diocese of Litchfield where Selwyn was Bishop after leaving New Zealand. See Macdonald-Milne, *Spearhead: The Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 6-7; Macdonald-Milne, *The Melanesian Brotherhood and the Tradition of Indigenous Evangelism in the Anglican Church in the Pacific Islands*, 5.

himself wanted to join but instead, at the request of the Bishop, became priest in charge of Makira District and the Brotherhood began to lose impetus, eventually disbanding.¹⁹ Although this movement did not last, it nevertheless had an influence in the founding of the later Melanesian Brotherhood, which adapted both its rules and, to some extent, its missionary strategy.²⁰

1.2 Ini Kopuria

Ini Kopuria was born around 1900 near Maravovo village on Guadalcanal. While at school there he was taught by John Steward, later to become Bishop of Melanesia and who was instrumental in the formation of the Melanesian Brotherhood. Later Kopuria was sent to Pawa around the time the then headmaster, Charles Fox, was involved with the St Aidan's Brotherhood, and from there to St Barnabas' School on Norfolk Island. Described by one of his former teachers as standing out from his contemporaries by being independent, strong willed and with a capacity for originality, he proved to be a promising student.²¹ After being sent for a time to St John's College, Auckland, in 1919, it was hoped that he would return home as a catechist or village teacher for his own people.²²

He chose instead to join the Solomon Islands Protectorate Native Armed Constabulary presumably because it offered more adventure and challenge than the "comparatively" dull life of a village teacher.²³ Stationed on his home island of Guadalcanal, Kopuria

¹⁹Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 227. There is some discrepancy here as MacDonald-Milne refers to the movement as "The Brotherhood of St Stephen" following Fox's use of "St Stephen" in an obituary of Ini Kopuria in the Southern Cross Log of January 1946. See Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 31. Yet Fox himself refers to the community as "The St Aidan's Brotherhood" in Fox, *Kakamora*, 66. See also Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 214-217. And John Garrett, *Footsteps in the Sea: Christianity in Oceania to World War II* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1992), 348.

²⁰Fox, *Kakamora*, 67. Hilliard also lists it as an influence of the later Melanesian Brotherhood in Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 227.

²¹ Cited in Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 32. There are further descriptions of Kopuria as a schoolboy in Margaret Lycett, *Brothers: The Story of the Native Brotherhood of Melanesia* (London: SPCK, 1935), 8-9. And Fox, *Kakamora*, 67-68.

²² Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 33.

²³ For primary sources see John Steward, *The Brotherhood of Melanesia* (Auckland: Unknown Publisher, 1928), 1; Charles Elliot Fox, *The Melanesian Brotherhood* (London: The Melanesian Mission, n.d.), 6.

quickly rose to the rank of corporal and in the course of his work, travelled all over the island getting to know not only the coastal peoples but also those in the bush areas. This would become very important for his later work as a missionary.²⁴

In 1924 however, Kopuria was injured in an accident which left him hospitalised and, while convalescing, appears to have had a religious experience. He believed that Jesus had appeared to him in a vision saying, “Ini, you are not doing the work I want you to do”.²⁵ After leaving hospital, Kopuria discussed this with Bishop Steward, returned home and spent time at the nearby mission school at Maravovo with the principal, Arthur Hopkins, one of his former teachers at Norfolk Island. According to Fox, it was through Hopkins’ influence that Kopuria decided to form a Brotherhood of young men who would take Christianity to the pagan villages of Guadalcanal, the same villages which he used to visit as a policeman.²⁶

Bishop Steward was sympathetic to the idea and helped him to work out and draw up rules for his new community. The initial aim of the Brotherhood was simple, namely to take the Christian faith to the heathen, first on Guadalcanal and later to the rest of Melanesia and beyond.²⁷ The Brothers would take promises to remain unmarried, to accept no payment and to obey those in authority.²⁸ Kopuria would be Head Brother over the Order, while the Bishop would have the title “Father of the Brotherhood” whose decision in disputes would be final. On the 28th October 1925, Kopuria took a formal life vow to keep the promises of the Brotherhood and in the following year the

Secondary sources which refer to this include Lycett, *Brothers: The Story of the Native Brotherhood of Melanesia*, 12-13; Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 227.

²⁴ There is some discrepancy as to what rank Kopuria rose to within the Police force. Hilliard quotes the Southern Cross Log of June 1946 which quotes Kopuria referring to himself as a Police sergeant. Fox also refers to him as a sergeant in Fox, *Kakamora*, 68. In an earlier work, however, he describes him “as rising to a position of authority in the Police Force”. See Fox, *The Melanesian Brotherhood*, 6. However MacDonald-Milne writes that he was a lance-corporal and would have probably gone on to be a sergeant if he had stayed on longer. See Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 33. He further comments that Fox was probably mistaken in his claim. (See page 38)

²⁵ See Fox, *The Melanesian Brotherhood*, 6; Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 227; Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 34.

²⁶ Fox, *Kakamora*, 68; Fox, *The Melanesian Brotherhood*, 6.

²⁷ The term ‘heathen’ is common throughout Melanesia and used by Melanesians themselves to describe those who follow traditional Melanesian religions and beliefs. The term, at least in Melanesia, does not imply lack of appreciation or respect for the traditional beliefs, as noted in Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 10.

²⁸ Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 229.

Brotherhood was formed with six new members joining him from Santa Isabel, Guadalcanal and the Russell Islands.²⁹

Despite the first year being “unspectacular”, (Hilliard’s words), the Brotherhood began to grow.³⁰ Households were eventually established beyond Guadalcanal at Santa Cruz (1927), north and central Malaita, the Polynesian outlying islands of Sikaiana (1929) and Ontong Java (1933) and Tulagi on Gela. It then began to move further beyond Solomon Islands to Aoba (now Ambae) and Pentecost in the New Hebrides (Vanuatu), to New Britain and to Fiji. Large numbers of young men began to join, exceeding Steward’s cautious expectation of around only twenty. By 1935 there were 128 members of the Brotherhood.³¹

1.3 Influences and Motivations

While Kopuria was instrumental in the founding of the Brotherhood he was aided and influenced by expatriates such as Fox, Steward and Hopkins who were sympathetic to his vision. He had, for example, been a pupil at Pawa while Fox was involved with the St Aidan’s Brotherhood and its leader, Ellison Kokou, was from the same village and a close friend.³² Both Steward and Hopkins had also taught Kopuria at Maravovo and Norfolk Island respectively. Both Hilliard and Macdonald-Milne note that Kopuria would have learnt about the Religious Orders in Europe from history classes at Norfolk Island and they may have had some influence.³³ There were, however, a number of other factors, which contributed to the formation and early success of the Brotherhood: First, Kopuria’s work as a policeman clearly influenced his thinking. It was work which took him to the many bush and coastal villages of his home island, thus he knew the people and it clearly fired his imagination in vowing to return to them, not as a

²⁹ In the beginning only Kopuria took a life vow, the other Brothers took vows for only one year that were renewable.

³⁰ Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 230.

³¹ Ibid; Steward, *The Brotherhood of Melanesia*, 13.

³² As noted in Fox, *Kakamora*, 67.

³³ Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 227; Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 34. Tippet also refers to Codrington’s lectures in Church History on Norfolk Island as being an inspiration. See Tippet, *Solomon Islands Christianity: A Study in Growth and Obstruction*, 51.

policeman but as a missionary. As he himself remarked, "I have visited all the villages as a police sergeant, and they all know me: why not go to them now as a missionary?"³⁴

Secondly, the Melanesian Brotherhood seemed to be a response to the need for a home-grown or Melanesian approach to evangelisation. It was, according to Hilliard, "an expression of a Melanesian aspiration for an indigenous vehicle for Christianity outside the European-dominated framework of the mission".³⁵ Certainly Munamua argues that the whole early approach of the Mission of taking Melanesians away from their cultural context and teaching them about Christianity in a European one, did lead to Melanesians associating Christianity with Europeans rather than something within themselves or their society.³⁶

In addition, the Melanesian Mission was also conditioned by the widespread belief among nearly all Christian missionaries and colonial Europeans that Melanesians were less intelligent than Europeans and incapable of academic education. This led to an inherent paternalism within the Mission from the turn of the century onwards. For example in 1902, the then Bishop of Melanesia, Cecil Wilson, wrote, "They [Melanesians] will never attain to that complete independence for which Bishop Selwyn, our founder used to hope".³⁷ H.N. Drummond, the last headmaster of St Barnabas' College commented that when teaching Melanesians, "there are intellectually, no men or women in the classroom, but all are children, boys and girls".³⁸

The result of such paternalism was a continuing European supervision over Melanesians with no opportunities for a real indigenous leadership. Instead the European domination simply encouraged a state of dependency. The original vision of both Selwyn and

³⁴Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 227.

³⁵Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 196; Tippett, *Solomon Islands Christianity: A Study in Growth and Obstruction*, 51; Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 229.

³⁶Munamua, "The Brothers of the Church: A Story About the Development of the Melanesian Brotherhood", 8. Similar views are expressed by the current Archbishop of Melanesia, see Ellison Pogo, "Ministry in Melanesia Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," in *The Church of Melanesia 1849-1999, 1999 Selwyn Lectures, Marking the 150th Anniversary of the Founding of the Melanesian Mission*, ed. Allan K Davidson (Auckland: The College of St John The Evangelist, 1999), 89. See also Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 147-148.

³⁷Cited in Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 199.

³⁸Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 222.

Patteson of a Melanesian Church led by Melanesians themselves had been replaced by paternalism and dependency on the Mission, which was a European-dominated institution. Whiteman argues that the Melanesian Brotherhood was, to some extent, a reaction to this inherent paternalism and, “a struggle for indigeneity. It was an attempt to adapt an introduced religion of foreign origin to the Melanesian context”.³⁹ This seems to be borne out in Fox’s comments in Kopuria’s obituary of 1946, when he noted that, “[Kopuria] thought it wrong that every Melanesian, because of his colour, should be inferior to every white man because of his colour. He felt that there was this feeling even within the Mission and the Church itself”.⁴⁰

Thirdly, the Brotherhood met a social need. There were few opportunities for young men leaving Mission schools who were interested in Mission work, the only option being the “humdrum” life of a village teacher.⁴¹ Lycett argues that many were not fitted to this kind of work and many were not prepared to accept it either. Kopuria himself choose the comparatively more exciting life of a policeman over that of a teacher. There were few openings for those seeking greater challenges of the wider world, the only options being the police service, plantation work or employment on a trading vessel.⁴² The Brotherhood provided an outlet for those wishing to serve in the Mission, particularly those too young to marry or settle down who sought greater adventure or excitement than the mission hitherto could offer.⁴³ Hilliard argues that young men were attracted to the Brotherhood by the combination of opportunities to work with school friends, the romance of the life of an itinerant evangelist on foreign islands and Kopuria’s magnetic personality.⁴⁴

³⁹Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 198; Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 229.

⁴⁰ Cited in Geoffrey Rowell, Kenneth Stevenson, and Rowan Williams, eds., *Love's Redeeming Work: The Anglican Quest for Holiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 648.

⁴¹Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 230; Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 196.

⁴²Lycett, *Brothers: The Story of the Native Brotherhood of Melanesia*, 22; Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 230.

⁴³ Steward, *The Brotherhood of Melanesia*, 5; M R Newbolt, ed., *John Steward's Memories* (Chester: Phillipson And Golder Ltd, 1939), 113; Tippett, *Solomon Islands Christianity: A Study in Growth and Obstruction*, 51. It is noticeable that all of these authors are non-Melanesian and questions can be raised whether this is a purely European interpretation. Although Munamua notes that much of the Brotherhood’s initial appeal did rest upon the small number of secular occupations for young men outside of their villages. See Munamua, "The Brothers of the Church: A Story About the Development of the Melanesian Brotherhood", 15.

⁴⁴Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 230.

2. **Special Features of the Brotherhood**

MacDonald-Milne highlights what he sees as the special features of the Brotherhood, identifying aim, uniform, methods and organization.⁴⁵ I shall therefore follow him and examine each in turn.

2.1 **Aim**

The primary aim of the Brotherhood was to evangelise areas and peoples as yet unreached by the Churches. This is stated in the first rule of the Brotherhood, “The work of the Brothers is to declare the way of Jesus Christ among the heathen; not to minister amongst those who have already received the Law”.⁴⁶

The Brothers mission was for preparation, to spearhead the evangelistic work of the Church and to open the way for catechists, teachers and priests who would follow up the work.⁴⁷ Over time this rule was revised, particularly as the Brotherhood grew and became more successful, as there simply were not enough teachers to do the follow-up work. Consequently, many of the early successes were nullified as the villages either went back to their “traditional” beliefs or accepted a teacher from a different Christian denomination.⁴⁸

In addition, the Brotherhood did not exist to provide an alternative to marriage or a community life as such. From the beginning Brothers took one-year vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience and were able either to renew them or be released to do other work. Brothers were able to stay in the Order for as long as they felt God was calling

⁴⁵ Macdonald-Milne, *Spearhead: The Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 9-14; Macdonald-Milne, *The Melanesian Brotherhood and the Tradition of Indigenous Evangelism in the Anglican Church in the Pacific Islands*, 7-10.

⁴⁶ Steward, *The Brotherhood of Melanesia*, 4. See also Fox, *Lord of the Southern Isles: The Story of the Melanesian Mission*, 268-269; Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 469-470.

⁴⁷ Macdonald-Milne, *Spearhead: The Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 9; Lycett, *Brothers: The Story of the Native Brotherhood of Melanesia*, 21; Newbolt, ed., *John Steward's Memories*, 113; Munamua, "The Brothers of the Church: A Story About the Development of the Melanesian Brotherhood", 13; Macdonald-Milne, *The Melanesian Brotherhood and the Tradition of Indigenous Evangelism in the Anglican Church in the Pacific Islands*, 7.

⁴⁸ Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 231; Fox, *Kakamora*, 75; Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 196; Morrell, *The Anglican Church in New Zealand*, 198; A Jones, "Brotherhood Conference," *The Southern Cross Log* (1956): 40.

them but, in reflecting the Melanesian character of the Brotherhood, celibacy for life was not practised, principally because men were expected to marry, continue the tribal line and fulfil tribal obligations.⁴⁹ The monastic vow was therefore “modified to harmonize with Melanesia’s tribal obligations”.⁵⁰ Over time, of those who left the Brotherhood many became catechists and teachers, which benefited the Church’s ministry at another level.

2.2 Uniform

The uniform of the Brothers was both practical and symbolic, the main uniform being a simple black loin cloth down to the knees and, at the waist, a black belt under which a white cloth formed a sash. On Sundays and Saints days the colours were reversed - a white loin cloth with a white belt and a black cloth under the belt. The sash was symbolic in that the white belt over the black sash represented light entering the darkness, a symbol of the Brothers’ work when entering heathen villages and the black belt over the white sash was a reminder that Brothers themselves could at times prevent the light from shining out clearly.⁵¹ The uniform was practical, being easy to wash, dry and carry while on mission and, at the admission of a Brother it was blessed thus becoming, in itself, highly respected. It had to be hung up at all times when not worn, and not left on the ground. In addition, only a Brother could wear the uniform and it could not be washed by women or young girls.⁵²

This all connected to the idea of a Brother’s holiness, in that the uniform, although humble, was believed to give the Brother a feeling of inner holiness. The Brotherhood’s headquarters at Tabalia on Guadalcanal, built on land given to the Brotherhood by Kopuria himself, was also highly respected. The headquarters or station was considered

⁴⁹ Macdonald-Milne, *Spearhead: The Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 9-10; Macdonald-Milne, *The Melanesian Brotherhood and the Tradition of Indigenous Evangelism in the Anglican Church in the Pacific Islands*, 7.

⁵⁰ Carter, "Where God Still Walks in the Garden: Religious Orders and the Development of the Anglican Church in the South Pacific," 47; Robert Moore and Gerald T Rayner, "The Melanesian Brotherhood," *Anglican Episcopal World*, Trinitytide 2004, 15.

⁵¹ This symbolism is explained by Brother Hulamae in Joshua Hulamae, "A Missionary Talk," *The Southern Cross Log* 71, no. 3 (1963): 92. See also Macdonald-Milne, *Spearhead: The Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 10; Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 238.

⁵² Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 55.

a “religious house” or holy ground and there were a number of rules associated with it to keep it that way. All visitors to the station had to remove their shoes before entering the Chapel area and no one could enter the Square of St Simon and St Jude on which Brothers made their vows, except the Brothers themselves and then only on that particular Saint’s day.⁵³ The station itself was only to be used for prayer and teaching and not for anything else. In terms of their personal conduct, Brothers were expected not to tell dirty stories and to “guard themselves from temptation, lying and unhelpful story telling”.⁵⁴ Their bodies, too, were considered holy and not to be touched even by fellow Brothers and never by females.

Around their necks Brothers wore a medal, which was originally a round shape with a cross in the middle, and the words “Jesus died on the cross” inscribed around it.⁵⁵ Later the medal was changed to an oval shape and the words inscribed around the cross were *Ira Retatasiu*, meaning “Company of Brothers” in Mota language.⁵⁶ Another part of the Brothers’ uniform as such and used in mission work was a walking stick sometimes used to cast out evil spirits from either people or places.

2.3 Methods

The evangelistic methods of the Brotherhood reflected their aim of identification with the people and their practical nature. When evangelising new areas, Brothers depended solely on the goodwill of villagers. Often they were encountered with hostility and had to find their own food in the bush. They moved from place to place speaking and proclaiming the Gospel to those who would listen, only staying in a village if they were invited to do so.⁵⁷

Once invited in and made welcome, the Brothers made themselves as self-supporting as possible, such as making a garden and growing food on land given to them or by

⁵³ This rule remains in force today as noted in Richard A Carter, *In Search of the Lost: The Death and Life of Seven Peacemakers of the Melanesian Brotherhood* (London: Canterbury Press, 2006), 19.

⁵⁴ Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 54.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 229.

⁵⁷ Macdonald-Milne, *Spearhead: The Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 10; Macdonald-Milne, *The Melanesian Brotherhood and the Tradition of Indigenous Evangelism in the Anglican Church in the Pacific Islands*, 8.

working with the people in their gardens. This made them popular and approachable and, at least in the eyes of the villagers, different from the expatriate missionaries and native clergy who were less approachable because of their status.⁵⁸

This method of identification through work seemed to be effective, as they showed people a willingness to identify with them, and a sense of humility and simplicity.⁵⁹ Whiteman claims that, "Brothers were no longer simply the missionised; they became missionaries to their own people and did so in a uniquely Melanesian way".⁶⁰ Their dedication in this identification and their simple life style enabled them to become both effective and influential missionaries.⁶¹

Another important factor was the Brothers' rule of never going anywhere alone, but always in pairs and, as far as possible, Brothers from different islands went together.⁶² This was significant because rivalries between islands were still strong but, in the Brotherhood, traditional "enemies" were very often side-by-side evangelising people. Moreover, normally people from other islands would not risk going into the bush to people who, in the past, might have been their traditional enemies.⁶³

⁵⁸ Macdonald-Milne, *Spearhead: The Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 10; Macdonald-Milne, *The Melanesian Brotherhood and the Tradition of Indigenous Evangelism in the Anglican Church in the Pacific Islands*, 8. Another useful secondary source is S W Artless, *The Story of the Melanesian Mission*, 5th ed. (Oxford: The Church Army Press, 1965), 31. Moore and Rayner appear to use such sources to make a similar point see Moore and Rayner, "The Melanesian Brotherhood," 15.

⁵⁹ Macdonald-Milne, *Spearhead: The Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 10-11; Macdonald-Milne, *The Melanesian Brotherhood and the Tradition of Indigenous Evangelism in the Anglican Church in the Pacific Islands*, 8. This is also a major theme in Carter, "Where God Still Walks in the Garden: Religious Orders and the Development of the Anglican Church in the South Pacific," 46; Richard A Carter, "Transforming Missionaries: Reflections on the Missionary Calling of the Brotherhood," in *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, ed. Brian Macdonald-Milne (Leicester: Christians Aware 2003), 335-357.

⁶⁰ Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 198.

⁶¹ Charles W Forman, *The Island Churches of the South Pacific: Emergence in the Twentieth Century*, American Society of Missiology Series No. 5 (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1982), 50.

⁶² See also Fox, *The Melanesian Brotherhood*, 8; Macdonald-Milne, *Spearhead: The Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 11; Macdonald-Milne, *The Melanesian Brotherhood and the Tradition of Indigenous Evangelism in the Anglican Church in the Pacific Islands*, 8.

⁶³ Macdonald-Milne, *Spearhead: The Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 11; Macdonald-Milne, *The Melanesian Brotherhood and the Tradition of Indigenous Evangelism in the Anglican Church in the Pacific Islands*, 8. This rule was strikingly illustrated more recently when, during the recent conflict, Brothers elected a Head Brother from Malaita and an Assistant Head Brother from Guadalcanal the two ethnic groups involved in the fighting. See for example Richard A Carter and Jude Alfred, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities" *Pacific Journal of Theology* 2, no. 33 (2005): 72.

Another symbol of the Brothers' unity was the use of languages. Brothers with different mother tongues used the common languages of Mota and Pijin, which were, in themselves, symbols of unity and a common purpose but they also strove to learn the local languages wherever possible or communicated through a translator. This was another form of identification with the people.⁶⁴

2.4 Organization

MacDonald-Milne argues that the organization of the Brotherhood reflected its Melanesian character. A Head Brother (*Tuaga* in Mota language) was chosen by the Brothers at an annual meeting of the Brotherhood and confirmed by the Bishop of Melanesia who holds the title "Father of the Brotherhood" (*Mama*). He has the final say on all decisions and problems that the Brothers could not solve themselves would be referred to him. The Father of the Brotherhood would also make the final decisions as to where the Brothers would work (after it had been discussed in the annual meeting). They would be commissioned at the end of that same meeting and sent out to "Households" around the various islands. These were simple leaf roofed houses, similar to the traditional single men's houses in many villages, and run by an Elder Brother (*Moemera*). Households, which would consist of no more than twelve Brothers, would be the bases for their mission and evangelising work. Brothers would do all the household chores and be expected to follow general rules and practices for each Household.⁶⁵

Each Elder Brother would have a helper (*Tua*) and according to Fox, the two of them would generally be from different islands, presumably another way of reinforcing the common Christian identity of Brothers over tribal and inter-island rivalries.⁶⁶

Another important feature of the Brotherhood Households was the confession meetings. This was an opportunity for Brothers to point out anything wrong in the conduct of other Brothers, not in order to accuse anyone, but rather to deal with issues and

⁶⁴ A point picked up in Moore and Rayner, "The Melanesian Brotherhood," 15.

⁶⁵ Macdonald-Milne, *Spearhead: The Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 11; Macdonald-Milne, *The Melanesian Brotherhood and the Tradition of Indigenous Evangelism in the Anglican Church in the Pacific Islands*, 9; Carter, "Where God Still Walks in the Garden: Religious Orders and the Development of the Anglican Church in the South Pacific," 48.

⁶⁶ Fox, *The Melanesian Brotherhood*, 8.

problems that might be detrimental to community life.⁶⁷ In addition, any Brother with a complaint against another was supposed to tell him privately and seek to resolve the issue. This is explicitly stated in the Rules of the Brotherhood and is common in the monastic rule of religious communities.⁶⁸ This was an important way, particularly in a community made up of men from diverse cultures, languages and customs, of addressing tensions and rivalries in that community itself.

The headquarters of the Brotherhood established at Tabalia was primarily set up for the teaching and training of Novices (*Tinqoro*, meaning “hearer” in Mota language). In the beginning, the Noviciate lasted for at least one year.⁶⁹

The organizational structure of the Brotherhood reflected a distinct blending between both Melanesian and non-Melanesian church and cultural forms. The monastic vows of the Order, for example, were inherited from North African/European religious traditions but implemented in Melanesia as temporary, and not life, vows to allow for the implications of tribal obligations in marriage. Similarly, confession meetings were also a feature of European religious orders but implemented in Melanesia to address tensions and rivalries arising from cultural and tribal diversity. The leadership of the Brotherhood also reflected a clear chain of command, but the development of “Households” allowed Brothers to live and work in corporate communities that reflected a sense of egalitarianism.⁷⁰ These are all examples of how, in the combination of Melanesian and non-Melanesian Christian and cultural forms, the Brotherhood has come into being not as a purely “Melanesian” organization, nor as one that has inherited purely “foreign” Church traditions, but rather as one existing from a synthesis between them.

⁶⁷Lycett, *Brothers: The Story of the Native Brotherhood of Melanesia*, 24-25. These meetings are also mentioned in Fox, *The Melanesian Brotherhood*, 10; Charles Elliot Fox, "Retatasiu Melanesian Brotherhood," *The Southern Cross Log* 70, no. 2 (1962): 45-46; Fox, *Kakamora*, 69; Macdonald-Milne, *Spearhead: The Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 11-12; Macdonald-Milne, *The Melanesian Brotherhood and the Tradition of Indigenous Evangelism in the Anglican Church in the Pacific Islands*, 9.

⁶⁸ See for example Fox, *Lord of the Southern Isles: The Story of the Melanesian Mission*, 269.

⁶⁹ Fox *The Melanesian Brotherhood*, 9.

⁷⁰ Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 195.

3. *The Early Stages*

The Brothers first year of work was largely difficult and unsuccessful. Lycett describes the first mission of Brothers to the heathen of Guadalcanal as an almost complete failure.⁷¹ Kopuria had contacted a few villages in the bush and had been promised a hearing but, upon arriving, Brothers were disappointed with the reaction to their message. For example, in one village, the chief refused to listen until neighbouring villages had done so; in another, villagers were afraid of offending the traditional spirits; another reason given was that the new teaching may interfere with labour conditions and prevent collection of money for government tax. Some even appealed to the local District Officer to ask the Brothers to leave them alone, which was supported.⁷²

As Brothers moved from village to village, it seemed that their presence or message was not required, so much so that, as Lycett observed (Brothers), “disappointed, weary with their journeying and with the colder atmosphere they had encountered ...came back to Tambulivu...the adventure had failed”.⁷³

However in late 1926, the Brothers went out again to a different region of Guadalcanal after a number of villages had, “expressed willingness to receive the Brothers”.⁷⁴ This second attempt proved to be more fruitful with a number of new schools opened around Aola and the Marau Sound areas. The Brotherhood slowly began to grow and expanded to other islands. Once established, the Brotherhood grew quickly. In 1928 there were 15 members of the Brotherhood. This jumped to 128 in 1935, and to 140 in 1940.⁷⁵ Households were established throughout Solomon Islands and beyond to Vanuatu, to the descendants of Solomons’ plantation workers in Fiji and to Papua New Guinea.

⁷¹Lycett, *Brothers: The Story of the Native Brotherhood of Melanesia*, 32.

⁷² Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 44. See also Lycett, *Brothers: The Story of the Native Brotherhood of Melanesia*, 33. John Steward wrote that the idea of heathen “gods” having to invoke the aid of a foreign government greatly amused the Brothers. See Steward, *The Brotherhood of Melanesia*, 9.

⁷³Lycett, *Brothers: The Story of the Native Brotherhood of Melanesia*, 33. “Tambulivu” is another word for Tabalia, which is also sometimes written as Tambalia. Today it is more commonly written as Tabalia but pronounced “Tambalia”.

⁷⁴ Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 44.

⁷⁵Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 230.

Although it was initially successful, there were a number of difficulties and factors which hindered the work leading to an eventual decline.⁷⁶ These were as follows:

First, many of the initial successes of the Brothers were nullified by the lack of teachers to follow up their work. Originally the Brotherhood rules only allowed Brothers to stay in villages for one month before moving on.⁷⁷ These rules were eventually revised not only to allow Brothers to stay longer but also to permit them to undertake “revival work”.

Secondly, the original system of Brothers taking annual vows meant a rapid turnover of members with few remaining more than three years. This affected the stability of the movement and the capacity to train new Novices and Brothers. Again, this rule was eventually later revised to address this problem.⁷⁸

Thirdly, it became apparent that many members of the Brotherhood in its initial period of growth were from islands only recently converted to Christianity. Those who had been Christianised the longest supplied the fewest recruits.⁷⁹ This is borne out in the Brothers’ conference of 1935 which, when breaking down numbers of membership to islands, noted that forty five came from Malaita and twenty two from Pentecost who were “mostly men with little or no education from villages recently converted”.⁸⁰ In contrast, those islands Christianised the longest provided far fewer. For example only four Brothers came from Gela and thirteen from Santa Isabel. Perhaps, to some extent the remarkable growth of the Brotherhood went hand in hand with the initial appeal of Christianity as a new innovation among the newly converted. The question was whether this initial appeal could be maintained in the long term.

Finally, Tippett claims that one important factor in the initial appeal of the Brotherhood is that it provided an alternative to the limited opportunities for young men outside their home villages. It fulfilled a social need by providing new opportunities. However Tippett argues that with the new economic changes and opportunities that came to the

⁷⁶ Ibid., 231.

⁷⁷ See Fox, *Kakamora*, 75.

⁷⁸ Charles Elliot Fox, "Retatasiu (Native Brotherhood)," *The Southern Cross Log* (1955): 53-54; Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 231.

⁷⁹ Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 230-231.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

islands, along with an increase in wages for labour, young men were attracted more to economic benefits and security rather than to the vow of poverty in the Brotherhood.⁸¹ This would lead to an eventual decline in numbers of young men wanting to join the Order.

In addition to these difficulties, the Brothers also faced criticism from some within the Melanesian Mission itself. Fox claims that a major criticism centred on the motivations of the young Brothers in joining. Questions were raised over a perceived lack of vocation within the Brotherhood and whether men joined simply for the glamour and romance of it as opposed to any real calling.⁸² This was a criticism no doubt fuelled by the high recruitment of members but few staying for more than three years.

Others, argues Garrett, thought the Brothers were in danger of becoming a “holier-than-thou” spiritual elite, rivalling the already established mana of the Priesthood.⁸³ Certainly in the case of native clergy, Whiteman believes this to be so. He claims that Brothers were seen as direct spiritual competitors to the power and authority of the clergy who felt threatened by the emergence of an order of “amateurs” seriously rivalling their own positions as the established professional elite.⁸⁴ Moreover, Fox contends that the other expatriate missionaries never really considered Brothers as members of a Religious Order. Instead of encouraging them in their evangelistic role, they were often used as cheap labour to do odd jobs such as rebuilding a church or moving a school.⁸⁵

Yet the criticisms and attitudes of some of the expatriate missionaries appeared in stark contrast to that of the Melanesian village Christians who, observes Fox, “have always

⁸¹Tippett, *Solomon Islands Christianity: A Study in Growth and Obstruction*, 51.

⁸²Fox, *Kakamora*, 76.

⁸³Garrett, *Footsteps in the Sea: Christianity in Oceania to World War II*, 349. Although Garrett’s work is largely a secondary source drawing on secondary material, such a view is supported by Whiteman who draws more heavily on primary historical material.

⁸⁴Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 197.

⁸⁵Fox, *Kakamora*, 76. Fox describes how a leading priest of the Mission noted that Brothers were merely looked upon as cheap labour. See also Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 197; Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 231; Munamua, "The Brothers of the Church: A Story About the Development of the Melanesian Brotherhood", 14.

held the Brothers in the highest honour and treated them almost with reverence”.⁸⁶ Hilliard comes to the same conclusion, noting that the Brothers acquired unique prestige among island Christians.⁸⁷

Here there seems to have been a tension between the “grass roots” Christianity of the village level that the Brothers came to represent and the institutional Christianity of the Melanesian Mission.⁸⁸ A Mission that had become highly paternalistic and European-dominated was now being challenged by an indigenous Religious Order operating among Melanesians and by Melanesians. The hostility of the native clergy and some of the missionaries towards the Brothers was not only a question of rivalry over spiritual power but also represented a clash between clergy moulded in the English tradition and Anglo-Catholic ritualism of the Melanesian Mission on the one hand, and an indigenous Order springing out of a background of local custom and culture on the other.⁸⁹ Yet the Brotherhood was also an example of how European religious traditions were applied in a Melanesian context, evolving through the interaction with Melanesian Christianity and culture.

This “tension” was implied again when Kopuria formed the Companions, a village level body that would support the work of the Brotherhood. Companions would support the aims of the Brotherhood, meet regularly to pray for them and offer practical support not only for Brothers but also to their own local church. The reasons for forming such a group were clear as Kopuria himself stated, “I want the Brotherhood to rest on Melanesians, not Europeans, but they must be keen Christians”.⁹⁰ Here was an important base, independent from the Mission hierarchy and, like the Brotherhood, it quickly grew in number.⁹¹

⁸⁶Fox, *Kakamora*, 76.

⁸⁷Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 231.

⁸⁸ A point argued in Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 198.

⁸⁹John Garrett, *Footsteps in the Sea: Christianity in Oceania to World War II*, 349.

⁹⁰Charles Elliot Fox, "Retatasiu Melanesian Brotherhood," *The Southern Cross Log* 70, no. 2 (1962): 47; Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 59.

⁹¹Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 197.

In all the difficulties and criticisms the Brothers faced however, none was more serious than the impact of the Second World War in the Pacific which almost obliterated the Order completely. The Japanese invaded the Brothers' headquarters at Tabalia and burned their Church, houses and books.⁹² Households throughout the Solomons finding themselves in occupied Japanese territory, were forced to close and the Brothers to flee.⁹³ Many Brothers simply resigned, fled or worked for the Americans who had arrived in 1942. Kopuria, who had led the Brotherhood for the previous fifteen years, was released from his life vow in 1940 after he expressed a wish to marry. He did marry three months later and it was planned that he should become a village priest. However, after the Japanese and American invasions, he joined the American Labour Corps. At the end of the war, Kopuria and his wife returned to Maravovo where he worked as a village deacon until he died of tuberculosis in 1945. Having witnessed the near destruction of the Brotherhood he created, and probably weighed down by feelings of guilt at leaving, Kopuria's last years appear to have been uneasy and unhappy ones. Both of his children died in infancy and, according to most accounts, he deeply regretted leaving the Brotherhood.⁹⁴ His death in 1945 is described by Macdonald-Milne:

Brother Robert Raeriara reported that his death was like that of a child, as he said nothing to the Brothers or even his wife, except to ask for certain things to be brought to him, which he then threw away. He even asked for the Brothers and his wife and two villagers to leave him, but they did not. The Brothers felt that his sad and disturbing death was the result of his breaking his life vow, and Ini's attitude and actions suggest that he had the same feeling.⁹⁵

⁹²Fox, *Kakamora*, 78; Fox, "Retatasiu (Native Brotherhood)," 53; Fox, "Retatasiu Melanesian Brotherhood," 47; Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 142.

⁹³Artless, *The Story of the Melanesian Mission*, 31.

⁹⁴The most complete account of Kopuria's release from the Brotherhood is in Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 136-144. See also Macdonald-Milne, *Spearhead: The Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 8; Macdonald-Milne, *The Melanesian Brotherhood and the Tradition of Indigenous Evangelism in the Anglican Church in the Pacific Islands*, 6; Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 231-232; Carter, *In Search of the Lost: The Death and Life of Seven Peacemakers of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 24-25; Munamua, "The Brothers of the Church: A Story About the Development of the Melanesian Brotherhood", 14-15.

⁹⁵ Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 144.

By 1946, the Brotherhood had not only been almost completely destroyed but it had lost its leader whose magnetic personality had not only brought the Order into existence but also persuaded so many young men to join it. However, the Brotherhood did continue although now very small and a shadow of its former self, but with the support of the Bishop and the few remaining Brothers, the Order started again almost from scratch.⁹⁶ By 1947 there were again Novices training at Tabalia and by 1951 there were thirty-five Brothers and twenty Novices in training. By 1954 there were a total of fifty-seven Brothers under vows and, slowly, Brotherhood numbers began increasing.

4. The Brotherhood Today

The four features that MacDonald-Milne identifies (aim, uniform, methods and organization) are still prominent in the Brotherhood today, be it with some revision for the changing situation. As the Brotherhood slowly recovered from the war years a number of issues still needed to be resolved. The first concerned the long-standing problem of finding teachers to follow up the Brothers' work. In order to address this problem it was decided in the annual Brotherhood meeting of 1954 that Brothers could stay more than three months in a place if there was no teacher available. This, argues Fox, represented a significant step towards changing the Brotherhood from a purely missionary Brotherhood to a teaching one, something that Fox himself had hoped for.⁹⁷

This was the beginning of the Brothers' involvement in renewal work among lapsed or nominal Christians alongside their work as primary evangelists.⁹⁸ By 1968 the Father of the Brotherhood had stated that Brothers should be involved in renewal work in the districts and in co-operation with the clergy and catechists.⁹⁹ The new chaplain of the Brothers at that time, Fr Brian Macdonald-Milne, was charged with the responsibility of

⁹⁶ Ibid., 152.

⁹⁷ See Fox, *Kakamora*, 79; Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 157.

⁹⁸ Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 196-197.

⁹⁹ Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 190-191. The minutes of the conference are also in his possession. The view of the Bishop was also echoed in Tippett, *Solomon Islands Christianity: A Study in Growth and Obstruction*, 52; F W Coaldrake, *Floodtide in the Pacific* (Stanmore: Australian Board of Mission, n.d), 48.

planning and training the Brothers for this task.¹⁰⁰ A year later, Macdonald-Milne acknowledged that the Brothers were now working in three major fields, among non-Christians (both Pacific Islanders and Fijian Indians), lapsed or weak Christians, and Companions of the Brotherhood.¹⁰¹

Consequently, mission strategies had to be developed for all areas of their work. As the number of “heathen” people decreased, so the revival aspect of the Brothers’ work became more important. New mission strategies had to be developed for both rural and urban settings particularly as Honiara, the capital, and other provincial centres developed and Brothers had to work more closely with other Religious Communities and the clergy. Today the Brotherhood uses drama as an important tool for this work, (as did Kopuria during his ministry), leads workshops, Sunday schools and worship as the Brothers tour around both the remotest villages in the country and the more accessible urban centres. This is largely due to the work of Chaplains such as Fr Ernest Ball, Fr Brian MacDonald-Milne and later Fr Richard Carter who have worked tirelessly with the Brothers to formulate teaching aids, drama sketches and a training syllabus for use in mission work.

Another long-standing problem was the length of a Brother’s vow. The original vow of only one year had led to a rapid turnover of members, with many Brothers only staying for two or three years at the most. This fuelled the criticism of some expatriate missionaries that Brothers had never had any real calling at all, and were joining simply for glamour or to escape from village life. This appears to have been on the mind of Reynolds who, in an article in the *Southern Cross Log*, remarked:

There is yet much work for the Brothers to do elsewhere and there are many young men in the movement. They need your prayers, prayers that there may be a true sense of vocation in those that join it, prayers that Melanesians may be raised up who will become leaders in the movement and thus give it strength and a clearer vision of the task that God is calling its members to do.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ See Brian MacDonald-Milne, "The Brothers," *The Southern Cross Log* 77, no. 1 (1969): 29; Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 190.

¹⁰¹ MacDonald-Milne, "The Brothers," 30.

¹⁰² H V C Reynolds, "The Brothers," *The Southern Cross Log* (1952): 371.

Another factor implied in this comment regarded questions of stability. With such a rapid turnover of members, few Brothers stayed long enough to gain experience and become leaders. This was a concern of Fox who raised the same issue three years after Reynolds' comments.¹⁰³ During the annual Brothers conference of 1960, it was decided that the initial vow should be extended to three years, after which Brothers could choose either to renew the vow annually or to be released. This length of vow increased again to five years after the conference of 1962 before returning to three years again in 1971.¹⁰⁴

Today the vow remains at three years which can be renewed for an indefinite period. Other important changes have included the adoption of a formal constitution at the first Great Conference of 1965. Due to the sheer size and continuing development of the Brotherhood, it became impracticable to hold annual meetings, therefore a "Great Conference" would meet every four years, presided over by the Father of the Brotherhood. The Brotherhood itself was now organized into three main Regions: the Solomon Islands Region, Papua New Guinea Region and the Southern Region (covering Vanuatu and Fiji). These Regions were then split into Sections, each contiguous with a diocese and having the Diocesan Bishop as the Section Father. The Section would meet annually in conference. The Region would also have a Bishop as Regional Father, and would meet in Regional Conference every two years. Representatives of all the Sections and Regions would then be elected to attend the Great Conference at the Brotherhood's headquarters at Tabalia every four years, where the posts of Head Brother, Assistant Head Brother and Regional Head Brothers would be filled.¹⁰⁵

Other changes included the development of the Novice programme into a two and later three-year programme, after which Novices could be admitted as Brothers. These changes remain in place today, but the ethos and core values of the Brotherhood have remained the same. As well as being the largest male Religious Community in the

¹⁰³ Charles Elliot Fox, "Retatasiu (Native Brotherhood)," 53-54.

¹⁰⁴ H V C Reynolds, "Ira Retatasiu-Annual Conference," *The Southern Cross Log* 71, no. 1 (1963): 24; Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 168, 200.

¹⁰⁵ Macdonald-Milne, *Spearhead: The Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 16; Macdonald-Milne, *The Melanesian Brotherhood and the Tradition of Indigenous Evangelism in the Anglican Church in the Pacific Islands*, 13; Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 180.

Anglican Communion, the Brotherhood has also spread out beyond Melanesia to the Philippines and as far as the United Kingdom.¹⁰⁶ Carter claimed that in 2000 there were approximately 450 Brothers and 180 Novices currently under vows across the three regions of Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu and applications continue to increase well beyond the numbers that can realistically be accepted.¹⁰⁷

Why then does the community appear to be so popular? In his report of 1970 Macdonald-Milne pondered the same question. Then there were 104 Brothers, many of whom had made vows in the previous five years. He concluded that, “the Brotherhood still has a powerful hold on the minds of young Melanesian men”.¹⁰⁸ He then outlined five reasons for this:

1. It is a Melanesian movement working along Melanesian lines under indigenous leadership.
2. It provides opportunities for young Melanesian men to grow in faith, maturity and responsibility.
3. It offers a real challenge spiritually, emotionally, and physically and (for some) mentally.
4. It has a clear aim—the proclaiming of the Good News of Jesus Christ to the heathen and those weak in faith.
5. It has resources to draw on such as the prayer and support of the Companions, the advice of the Father of the Brotherhood and the teaching of tutors as well as the spiritual care given by the Chaplains.¹⁰⁹

Many of these factors appear similar to the original motivations and influences for the creation of the Brotherhood in the first place, but it seems that the first is one of the

¹⁰⁶ Carter, "Where God Still Walks in the Garden: Religious Orders and the Development of the Anglican Church in the South Pacific," 45-46.

¹⁰⁷ Carter, *In Search of the Lost: The Death and Life of Seven Peacemakers of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 27. Macdonald-Milne puts the figure at around 350 for 2000. While Bevans and Schroeder claim over 250 for the same year. It is likely that Carter is the more accurate due to his more recent connection to the Brotherhood as Chaplain (1994-2000) and as a Brother himself (2000-2004) See Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 293; Stephen B Bevans and Roger P Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 268.

¹⁰⁸ Brian MacDonald-Milne, "Report on the Melanesian Brotherhood," *The Melanesian Messenger* (1970): 5.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

most important. Brothers were able to identify closely with Melanesians, precisely because they were Melanesian themselves. They were not foreign evangelists with “foreign cultural systems”, (although such systems were adapted for use in a Melanesian context), but Melanesians who shared Melanesian values.¹¹⁰ They were and are respected and loved by people because they belong to Melanesia and stood in contrast to the Melanesian Mission, highly institutionalised, paternalistic and dependent on Western models of leadership and Church organization. This is certainly the view of Pech who, when referring to the success and perseverance of the Brotherhood, noted that it:

must be measured against the lesser achievements of a mission hierarchy lagging in its training of indigenous priests during a period when it concentrated on institutional ‘missions’ and increased the degree of westernisation and missionary control of the church.¹¹¹

This, argues Whiteman, explains why, while indigenous Anglican priests were feared and respected, the Brothers were loved and admired by village Christians.¹¹²

More recently, Carter has concluded that a major reason for the success of the Brotherhood is the inculturation of the Gospel message within the community itself. Its methods and agendas, he claims, are not set out by “the structures of the church” but are worked out by the Brothers themselves in the context of community life. There is some degree to which the Brotherhood is able to exist and operate independently of the rest of the Church of Melanesia. Although the Archbishop as Father of the Brotherhood has the final decision over matters, the Brothers themselves decide many of its decisions and agendas. A good example of this being the decision to choose and commission a team of Brothers to work directly for peace during the conflict in May 2000, a decision made by the Brotherhood during one of its community meetings.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Carter, "Where God Still Walks in the Garden: Religious Orders and the Development of the Anglican Church in the South Pacific," 46.

¹¹¹ Rufus Pech, "The Acts of the Apostles in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands," in *An Introduction to Ministry in Melanesia*, ed. Brian Schwarz, *Point No. 7* (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1985), 25.

¹¹² Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 197.

¹¹³ Carter, *In Search of the Lost: The Death and Life of Seven Peacemakers of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 46; Carter and Alfred, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in

In addition, Carter claims that the Brotherhood, as a community, has always sought to work with communities and individuals who are part of that community, never divorced from it. Reflecting the communal nature of Melanesian societies, the missionary methods of the Brotherhood have never sought to convert individuals or encourage individualistic values that lead to exclusivism or isolation from the group: rather they aim at the whole community.¹¹⁴ The approach is to respect and include existing community structures. In a village which already has a church, that church and its leaders must be respected. Brothers do not strive to convert individuals, because that makes individuals outcasts from the rest of the community and outside community structures. Rather, Brothers aim at mission for the whole community in order to share with the whole group and to use and transform that unity in the knowledge of Christ.¹¹⁵

While community as a key Melanesian value is upheld and maintained in the Brotherhood, there are also levels of relational and reciprocal giving and exchange at work within its organizational structures that reflect those at work in Melanesian societies generally. For example when short of food, Brothers will always provide for guests first, even if it means going without. When Brothers go into communities, they serve that community by giving and contributing to its continuing existence. Very often Brothers work in villagers' gardens, repair damaged houses, go fishing, help to resolve tribal or land disputes and so on. That giving is, in itself reciprocal: it is not a form of cheap labour, but part of a deepening relationship between all concerned. A village or community would give back to the Brothers in terms of food and support. The Companions who support and encourage the work of the Brotherhood are engaged in a constant relationship with Brothers and reflect levels of reciprocal giving and exchange that are fundamental to Melanesian life.¹¹⁶

In addition, Carter argues that there is a simplicity of lifestyle within the Brotherhood, in that Brothers have few possessions or luxuries and are not seen by the outside world

Solomon Islands with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities ": 72.

¹¹⁴ Carter, "Transforming Missionaries: Reflections on the Missionary Calling of the Brotherhood," 343.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. This point is also recognized by Tippett . See Alan R Tippett, *The Deep Sea Canoe: The Story of Third World Missionaries in the South Pacific* (South Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1977), 32.

¹¹⁶ *Anglican Religious Communities Year Book 2002-2003: Expanded International Edition*, (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2001), 99.

to be working for profit. Resources within the Brotherhood are also limited meaning that, for example, more than forty Novices share just one dormitory, sleeping on mats.¹¹⁷

In a number of field interviews conducted in Solomon Islands in May 2005, many informants, if not all, commented that one of the most important qualities or characteristics of the Brotherhood is the Brothers' sense of humility and simple life style. As one in particular noted:

It is their simplicity, humble lifestyle and simple faith which achieves a great deal. They can identify with people, fit into any situation, become part of them and understand the people's pains and joys. Therefore they can minister to them.¹¹⁸

Moore and Rayner argue that through this close identification with people, Brothers have acquired a type of mystique. Such "mystique" is usually acquired by groups distancing themselves from the people it overawes, but in the case of the Brotherhood, they claim, it is the opposite. Rather than being distanced, the Brothers achieve people's respect and admiration by being in close relationship and identifying with them.¹¹⁹

One Anglican Priest told me that there is sometimes friction or tension between some clergy and Brothers even today, the reason being that, for him, Brothers "go down to the people's level". He further remarked that a South Seas Evangelical Pastor had once asked him, "What God do the Brothers worship? Because everyone seems to go to them, their prayers seem to work and their lives seem closer to God".¹²⁰ A similar remark was made by a United Church Minister who told me that United Church members would very often go to Brothers for healing before anyone else.¹²¹

5. *Mana and Spiritual Power*

¹¹⁷ Carter, "Transforming Missionaries: Reflections on the Missionary Calling of the Brotherhood," 336-337.

¹¹⁸ Interview with "A" May 2005, Tabalia, Solomon Islands.

¹¹⁹ Moore and Rayner, "The Melanesian Brotherhood," 16.

¹²⁰ Interview with "B" May 2005, Honiara, Solomon Islands

¹²¹ Interview with "C" May 2005, Honiara Solomon Islands

These last comments are important because not only do they reveal a sense of the Brothers' identification with people, but they also allude to something else. From the very beginning of their ministry, the Brothers very quickly gained a reputation for courage in the face of opposition. In the early days they were faced with threats of violence from hostile villages, but also the threat of spiritual harm from ghosts, evil spirits and ancestral spirits of the area. However, to the surprise of many villagers, the Brothers seemed unafraid of them and were in fact seen to drive them out through prayer. As their reputations grew, so too did accounts of their being able to perform miracles of healing and signs.¹²² Brothers were considered to have some kind of spiritual power or mana in order to do God's work. In the beginning when involved in converting the heathen, Brothers were not only able to convert as a result of close identification with people but also as a result of a power encounter as mentioned in chapter two of this thesis. As one recent informant put it, "In the beginning, when used to convert heathens, mana was confrontational, an encounter between the power of Christ through the Brothers and the church and the evil spirits and gods of the heathens".¹²³

Tippett's argument that Melanesians converted to Christianity because it was seen as more powerful than the traditional spirits or, in other words, had superior mana, seems to be borne out in some of the experiences of Brothers.¹²⁴ For example, John Steward while visiting the Brothers on Santa Cruz, went with Kopuria to exorcise the abode of a local god, noting that until, "he [the local god] had been subdued by someone with the necessary mana or ghostly power; the people did not feel safe in accepting Christianity".¹²⁵

The Brothers appeared fearless, not afraid of the traditional spirits, and this considerable courage and resilience would be qualities identified with mana. Their reputations grew even more when stories were told of their ability to cast out evil spirits, heal the sick and those affected by custom magic, and perform miracles or signs.¹²⁶ There are

¹²² Carter, *In Search of the Lost: The Death and Life of Seven Peacemakers of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 23.

¹²³ Interview with "A" May 2005, Tabalia, Solomon Islands

¹²⁴ Refer to Chapter 2.

¹²⁵ Newbolt, ed., *John Steward's Memories*, 121.

¹²⁶ Carter, *In Search of the Lost: The Death and Life of Seven Peacemakers of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 26.

numerous examples of these stories both recorded in Fox and Melanesian Mission literature. One, for example, concerned the very first Brothers, Dudley Bale and Moffat Ohigita, who were driven out of a village because the heathen priest had seen a third Brother with them whose face shone and terrified him.¹²⁷ Another example tells of how, when Brothers were performing the events of Holy Week on North Malaita in 1932, an angel was seen during the portrayal of Christ's agony, leading the author to comment that, "the effect of all this on the mind of the Heathen watchers must indeed have been tremendous".¹²⁸

There are also many stories of miracles attributed to Kopuria himself. MacDonald-Milne records such stories related to him by former Brothers of how Kopuria was said to have travelled on the backs of crocodiles, to have dried up the Mataniko river on Guadalcanal by striking it with his walking stick when he wished to cross and when one man tried to strike him behind his back, his arm froze in the striking position until Kopuria released him.¹²⁹ Another story illustrates how Kopuria used power as a method of conversion:

...when he (Kopuria) was in the Territory of New Guinea and an old man asked him to climb up a coconut tree for a nut, but Ini told him that his leg was no good and that he would have to do it himself. The old man refused. So Ini pointed his stick at the coconut and it fell down. The 'heathen' man said in Pidgin "Wat kaen devol ia? Mi laekem devol olsem!" (What kind of spirit can do that? I would like to have him!) Ini replied "Sapos iu wandem, iu save tekem". (If you want it, you can have it). It seems that in this way he tried to illustrate the power of God.¹³⁰

The mana of the Brotherhood was a factor in their apparent success and contributed to the unique prestige they gained among island Christians.¹³¹ An example of this can be found in Firth's work among the Polynesians of Tikopia. He noted that in reference to the Brothers' evangelistic work there, a Tikopian teacher listed them as part of the Melanesian Mission hierarchy which included the bishop, priests, deacons, teachers and

¹²⁷ Fox, *The Melanesian Brotherhood*, 11-12.

¹²⁸ "The Response of Melanesia to the Holy Spirit," (London: The Melanesian Mission, [1930's?]), 6-8. This story is also recorded in Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 115.

¹²⁹ Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 144.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 231.

Brothers but then added that the mana of the Brothers was great and on a par with that of the Bishop.¹³²

This mana seems to be a combination of the personal abilities and gifts of individual Brothers and their ability to heal and cast out evil spirits.¹³³ It was also believed that Brothers carried with them some kind of special protection. Macdonald-Milne describes how the early Brothers saw the medal they wore as a “breastplate for protection” as they visited heathen villages. Similarly, the walking stick they carried gained considerable significance as it was used to cast out spirits and exorcise *tabu* places. Their uniform including the sash and medal were also seen as signs of the Brothers’ holiness and a sign of being under God’s special protection.¹³⁴

The belief that Brothers can demonstrate mana remains today but when people speak of Brothers having mana it can mean many different things. It can refer to the personal abilities, skills and talents of individual Brothers or to their perceived charisma, grace, and authority, or of having God’s blessing on their work that grants them success. Despite the various definitions, it is a common perception that they do have some kind of mana. In the field interviews I conducted recently in Solomon Islands, almost every informant indicated this in varying degrees.¹³⁵ As one informant put it:

One cannot be an active member of the Companions or the Church of Melanesia for long without witnessing this power. I have seen Brothers extract promises from people, use rites and ceremonies to extract the truth from disputing parties, prayers for healing, forgiveness, exorcisms, you name it.¹³⁶

It is this belief that leads Anglican Christians to go to Brothers for healing before going to anyone else. Even members of other denominations will go to the Brothers rather

¹³²Raymond Firth, *Rank and Religion in Tikopia* (London: George Allen And Unwin Ltd, 1970), 341-342.

¹³³Fox records a story of how Brothers healed a Chiefs son on Malaita of severe tropical ulcers, consequently, the Chief asked for a Christian teacher to stay in the village. See Fox, *The Melanesian Brotherhood*, 12.

¹³⁴Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 54-55; Macdonald-Milne, *The Melanesian Brotherhood and the Tradition of Indigenous Evangelism in the Anglican Church in the Pacific Islands*, 16.

¹³⁵In mid 2005 I interviewed twenty five informants in both Solomon Islands and Auckland ranging from members of the Brotherhood, Priests, senior Church leaders, members of other religious communities, Companions of the Brotherhood, laypeople and members of different Christian denominations. All of these indicated a belief that Brothers had some kind of mana, although explanations as to what that mana is and how it operates differed.

¹³⁶Interview with “D” May 2005, Honiara, Solomon Islands

than their own priests or ministers. Why is this? Perhaps one reason is the indigenous nature of the community itself. It continues to reflect not only a deep spirituality but also Melanesian values. Is it, perhaps, because the Community is more Melanesian in nature and more in tune with Melanesian worldviews than the various Churches and church structures which have inherited European structural models? Or it may be that the interaction between the received Christianity of the Melanesian Mission and existing Melanesian worldviews has enabled the Community to demonstrate Melanesian cultural concepts such as mana in a changed Melanesian-Christian context.

What is clear is that Brothers do seem to be successful in casting out evil spirits (either real or imagined), in healing and in resolving disputes among people. The most explicit demonstration of the last, (solving disputes among people), was their role as peacemakers during the recent conflict and their apparent success in encouraging a peaceful means to end the conflict, thus preventing more bloodshed and loss of life.

It is this perceived success that draws people to the Brotherhood because, in Melanesian worldviews, nothing happens without a reason. If the Brothers appear to be successful, their prayers seem to be efficacious and they appear to be able to cast out spirits, then it must be for a reason, namely that they have spiritual power or mana.

5.1 The Attraction of Mana

Just as people seeking healing and so on, are attracted to the Brothers because they are perceived to have mana, this may be a major reason why young men join the Brotherhood in the first place. There are many factors which contribute to the popularity of the Community and these serve as motivations for young men to join, such as providing education and opportunities that take them beyond their home village and provide an exciting alternative to life.¹³⁷ Yet, there appears to be more to it than that. Whiteman when assessing why Melanesians are motivated to study at Bishop Patteson Theological College and enter the priesthood noted that:

¹³⁷ Carter, *In Search of the Lost: The Death and Life of Seven Peacemakers of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 28.

In numerous interviews with deacons, priests, and theological students, I inquired as to why they had chosen this profession. Invariably the reply was, “I want to serve my people”. This may in fact be a contributing factor, and it is certainly a commendable one, but I suspect that in most cases it was neither the only motivation nor the dominant one in desiring to become a priest in the Church of Melanesia.¹³⁸

He argues that a more dominant motivation is that it provides a way to gain access to mana and becomes an avenue to becoming a Melanesian “big man” or leader. It may be that the acquisition of mana is also an important if not crucial motivation for many joining the Brotherhood, particularly when considering the argument that Christianity was accepted in Melanesia on the basis of its superior mana and that mana concept still operates in an interaction with the form of Christianity that was received. Ahrens, writing in the Papua New Guinea context, argues that, “the main religious question in Melanesia is how to gain access to power and how to control it in order to make life successful”.¹³⁹ A recent informant in the Church of Melanesia reinforced such a comment by claiming that, “Melanesians look for power: if you have no power I won’t come to you”.¹⁴⁰ Is it not inconceivable then, that, for some, the Melanesian Brotherhood, respected for its simplicity and humility, becomes an avenue for the acquisition of power?

5.2 Mana as Feared

While the Brotherhood appears to be generally admired and respected, there is also an element of fear. This fear appears to operate on a number of levels. First, as Brothers are considered to be under God’s special protection, any attempt to harm them would result in God’s punishment manifest in misfortune, sickness or death.

Secondly, there is a fear among people of disobeying a Brother’s instruction or request, again for fear of some kind of negative consequence. This element of fear and perception of the Brotherhood’s power reveal a whole host of difficulties and

¹³⁸Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 338.

¹³⁹Theodor Ahrens, “Concepts of Power in a Melanesian and Biblical Perspective,” in *Grace and Reciprocity: Missiological Studies*, ed. Theodor Ahrens, *Point Series No. 26* (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 2002), 81.

¹⁴⁰Interview with “E” May 2005, Kohimarama, Solomon Islands

theological implications which will be explored later in this thesis. However, it will suffice to say at this point that in such a climate of fear and respect for one's spiritual power, Brothers are faced with considerable difficulties concerning its use. Carter has written of how prayers, collects, even objects including walking sticks, oil, water and stones that Brothers have prayed over, become seen as objects of power. Death, sickness, and injury become signs that someone has disobeyed a Brother's prayer.

Moreover, Brothers are often called upon to demonstrate mana in the course of their ministry.¹⁴¹ Carter claims that Brothers are constantly being asked to use their prayers to attack and punish, to find and punish adulterers, perceived sinners and sorcerers.¹⁴² In addition, as one informant explained, Brothers can be caught up in contemporary "power encounters", not with heathen religions but between church denominations. He spoke of how some parishioners like to use the Brothers as an example of how the Church of Melanesia is more powerful than any other church denomination.¹⁴³

It is perhaps no surprise that the perception that mana can be used to cast out evil spirits, heal the sick and to protect is also accompanied by a belief that Brothers can also use it to demand, threaten or curse. One informant, himself an ex-Brother, spoke of how he thought it justifiable to use mana to punish those who disobey or refuse to listen to him.¹⁴⁴ This, however, is a complex issue that to which we shall return later in the thesis.

6. Concluding Remarks

The Melanesian Brotherhood is a remarkable community of young men that continues to thrive. It clearly has had a significant impact on the development of the Melanesian Mission in the early days and the later Church of Melanesia. I have illustrated how and why it appears to have been so successful and have touched on the issue of the Brotherhood's mana, a concept that is central to this thesis and one which will become

¹⁴¹ Carter, *In Search of the Lost: The Death and Life of Seven Peacemakers of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 37.

¹⁴² Carter, "Transforming Missionaries: Reflections on the Missionary Calling of the Brotherhood," 352-353.

¹⁴³ Interview with "A" May 2005, Tabalia, Solomon Islands

¹⁴⁴ Interview with "F" May 2005, Honiara, Solomon Islands

more explicit when, in the next chapter, I consider the Brotherhood's role as peacemakers in the recent conflict.

Chapter 4

Conflict and Crisis in Solomon Islands

This chapter is split into two parts: the first deals with the background, causes and events that led to conflict and the events of that conflict itself; the second part deals with the role of the Melanesian Brotherhood as peacemakers during the initial conflict and beyond in the continuing crisis, culminating in the murder of seven Melanesian Brothers in 2003. I will use the terms “conflict” and “crisis” principally because the actual “conflict” between the armed militia groups was short-lived (1998-2000) but the social and economic “crisis” that it generated had serious long-term effects resulting in the arrival of a Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) in July 2003.

1. A Note on Sources

This overview of events is dependent on a number of books, articles, commentaries and interviews written both inside and outside the country. Two of the most extensive studies of events are to be found in Jon Fraenkel’s *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands* and Clive Moore’s *Happy Isles in Crisis: The historical causes for a failing state in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*. Both works are valuable as secondary sources because they are the first chronological accounts of events interpreted largely through a socio-political lens. That sets the boundaries for the relative strengths and weaknesses of their respective positions because, as at least two reviewers have noted, the events of the conflict need to be understood beyond a purely socio-political framework. Brown, for example, argues that although Fraenkel’s argument and perspective are “correct”, the analysis needs to go beyond politics to issues of culture and religion.¹ Richards, observes the heavy reliance of both works on printed and media sources and very few interviews with the key players or indigenous voices “on the ground”. This leads to his questioning of what these books actually are. Are they historical accounts of events and if so whose accounts? The lack of local people taking centre stage makes it difficult to judge

¹ Terry Brown, "The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands by Jon Fraenkel," *New Zealand Journal of History* 39, no. 2 (2005): 264.

whether they are good, bad or indeed “real” histories.² The identities and contexts of both writers also determine how they write. Fraenkel is an expatriate writing about events from afar and while such an approach will have relative strengths, it does not, Brown argues, “entirely capture the devastation, fear and sadness the whole crisis brought to many families and individuals in the Solomons”.³ Moore, on the other hand, although an expatriate, has, Richards claims, “a much deeper knowledge of the Solomons”.⁴ Moore himself refers to his association with events in Solomon Islands and the adopted Malaitan family with whom he has established a close friendship since 1976.⁵ This connection seems influential with Brown claiming that Moore’s work leans slightly towards the Malaitan perspective. He suggests reading both works together as Fraenkel appears to lean slightly in the opposite direction, towards Guadalcanal.⁶

Alongside these valuable accounts, there are various papers produced by the *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project* that give a useful background to events. Written largely from a socio-political and historical perspective, these offer important insights into the root causes of the conflict. Good examples include papers by Judith Bennett tracing the historical causes of conflict and Sinclair Dinnen’s accounts of the political situation and system of the nation.⁷ The majority of these authors however, are expatriate and writing from outside the country; this again raises questions over how much of what happens “on the ground” is really captured in their accounts. There are, however, some contributions to the series by Solomon Islanders with very close connections to events. Examples include Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka from the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal who, although living and working overseas, made a number of visits home and writes about events on Guadalcanal to some degree from an insider’s

² Rhys Richards, "The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands by Jon Fraenkel and Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004 by Clive Moore," *The Contemporary Pacific* 18, no. 2 (2006): 443,444.

³ Brown, "The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands by Jon Fraenkel," 266.

⁴ Richards, "The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands by Jon Fraenkel and Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004 by Clive Moore," 443.

⁵ Clive Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004* (Canberra: Asia Pacific Press, 2004), xi.

⁶ Brown, "The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands by Jon Fraenkel," 265-266.

⁷ See for example Judith A Bennett, *Roots of Conflict in Solomon Islands Though Much Is Taken, Much Abides: Legacies of Tradition and Colonialism*, State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Discussion Paper (Canberra: The Australian National University, 2002); Sinclair Dinnen, "Guns, Money and Politics: Disorder in the Solomon Islands," in *Arc of Instability? Melanesia in the Early 2000s*, ed. R J May, *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project* (Canberra: The Australian National University, 2003).

perspective, and George Gray a former Guadalcanal militant who gives his assessment of events and why he decided to join the “Guadalcanal cause”.⁸ Other important contributions come from Ruth Liloqula, the Under Secretary of National Planning in the Government, Hilda Kii, a lecturer at Solomon Islands College of Higher Education and Alfred Sasako a Member of Parliament, who give their views as to the causes and events that led to conflict.⁹ Also important is the contribution of writers such as Alice Pollard who, as leader of the *Women for Peace Group*, gives the perspective of women directly involved in peace negotiations.¹⁰ These are all important accounts which give views of the conflict from a wide range of political, social and cultural perspectives.

This overview of the conflict also depends, to a certain extent, on the various media releases from both national and international media which, although important, raise difficulties around bias and interpretation. As Fraenkel observes, the main media outlets in Solomon Islands are the Malaitan owned *Solomon Star* and the Government owned *Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation*. Both employed mainly Malaitan journalists, who, at the height of the conflict, and for their own personal safety would rarely venture outside the capital.¹¹ Consequently, there was much uncertainty about what was really happening on rural Guadalcanal. Reports from the international media are useful in “filling in the gaps”, particularly from foreign journalists who travelled into rural Guadalcanal, but tend to lean towards sensationalism driven, in Fraenkel’s words, “by the perennial quest for ‘hot issues’ to satisfy their own incautious headline-hungry editors back home”.¹²

Another apparent difficulty in the writing of socio-political commentators, particularly expatriates writing from afar, is an under-stating of the Church’s contribution to

⁸ Kabutaulaka, *Beyond Ethnicity: The Political Economy of the Guadalcanal Crisis in Solomon Islands*; James Tanis and George Gray, "In Between: Personal Experiences in the 9-Year Long Conflict on Bougainville and Habuna Momoruqu (the Blood of My Island) Violence and the Guadalcanal Uprising in Solomon Islands," *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project Working Papers* (2003), http://rspas.anu.edu.au/papers/melanesia/working_papers/Tanis-Gray.rtf.

⁹ Ruth Liloqula and Alice Aruhe'eta Pollard, *Understanding Conflict in Solomon Islands: A Practical Means to Peacemaking*, State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Discussion Paper (Canberra: The Australian National University, 2000); Hilda Kii, "The Ethnic Tension in Retrospect" (paper presented at the Solomon Islands Workshop: Building Peace and Stability, Canberra, 24th-26th October 2001); Alfred Sasako, "Rebuilding a Battered Solomon Islands" (paper presented at the Solomon Islands Workshop: Building Peace and Stability, Canberra, 24th-26th October 2001).

¹⁰ Liloqula and Pollard, *Understanding Conflict in Solomon Islands: A Practical Means to Peacemaking*.

¹¹ Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 13.

¹² *Ibid.*

peacemaking during the conflict. This may be due to unfamiliarity with how Solomon Islands societies function, in that politics or state appears to have less influence than that of culture and religion. Brown, the Anglican Bishop of Malaita, with extensive experience of living in the islands, argues, that Solomon Islands has three main institutions: traditional culture, the Church and the civil State, each reaching the country in that order. The first two are strong but the third is weak and when the civil State fails, the other two take over. For example, custom: Church leaders and institutions have often taken over functions such as conflict resolution, control of criminal elements, education, medicine, public works and strengthening of civil society.¹³ In such a context, custom and Church are significantly stronger and possibly more important than “State”. This would appear to affirm the view of Douglas who, when assessing Melanesian “weak states” concludes that it is custom and indigenised Christianity that build national consciousness and cohesion. Indigenised Christianity, she observes, is arguably “the key national and transnational symbol throughout Melanesia”.¹⁴ This, Weir argues, is surprising to both expatriates involved in the peace process and those writing about events from outside the country who seem to underestimate the influence of Church over State.¹⁵ The recognition of the role that the Church played in limiting bloodshed and encouraging a return to peace implies the need to move away from a purely “political” interpretation of events. In the words of a United Nations report on the conflict, “Much is to be learnt about conflict resolution ‘Solomons style’ from this experience”.¹⁶

The major sources for our examination of the work of the Melanesian Brotherhood come from Church of Melanesia sources, including the perspectives of expatriate writers such as Richard Carter, the Chaplain of the Brotherhood at the time of the murders and Terry Brown the Diocesan Bishop of Malaita. Both were present and

¹³ Terry Brown, "Ten Ways Australia and New Zealand Can Help the Solomon Islands," Anglican Communion News Service <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/news.cfm/2003/7/21/ACNS3518>.

¹⁴ Bronwen Douglas, "Weak States and Other Nationalisms: Emerging Melanesian Paradigms?," *State Society and Governance in Melanesia* Discussion Paper 00/3 (2000): 5. A similar view can be found in The Transparency International Report of 2004 which states that, in the Solomon Islands context: “Christianity remains the single most universal common factor across the different fabrics of the country”. See Paul Roughan, "National Integrity Systems Transparency International Country Study Report Solomon Islands 2004," (Blackburn, South Victoria: Transparency International, 2004), 7.

¹⁵ Christine Weir, "Christianity in the Solomon Islands-the Response in the Current Crisis," <http://rspas.anu.edu.au/melanesia/weir.htm>.

¹⁶ *United Nations Common Country Assessment Solomon Islands*, (Suva: Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator, 2002), 56.

involved in the Church's initiatives for peace and disarmament. Other sources include papers presented by members of the Brotherhood themselves, media releases and interviews that I conducted with Church leaders and members of the Brotherhood during mid-2005.

This brief assessment of sources suggests how no one source or commentator is theologically, ethically or culturally neutral. Expatriates writing about events will have their own perspectives depending on whether they write from the experience of being there, their connections to people involved, or their detachment from events giving an overview from afar. The question of why they write and for whom is also significant. The views of an expatriate policy maker writing for the Australian government in Canberra will be quite different from the Chaplain of the Melanesian Brotherhood involved in events and with responsibilities towards the welfare of that community.

This also applies to local commentators. For example, the views of Andrew Nori, spokesman for the Malaita Eagle Force, are likely to be biased towards the Malaitan perspective and different from those of George Gray, a Guadalcanal militant fighting for the Guadalcanal cause. Cultural identity and affinity is one thing but degrees of involvement are quite another. Alfred Sasako, like Nori, is Malaitan but, as a member of the Government that Nori helped to depose, will have a different perspective on those events. The degree to which people are involved also blurs the distinction between local and expatriate. The accounts of both may well have both similarities and differences of interpretation or approach but it does not follow that one is somehow more reliable than the other. For example, Kabutaulaka's account of events on Guadalcanal is an insider's perspective, but the fact that he spends considerable time living and working overseas will mean his perspective is different from that of Solomon Islanders directly involved and from the expatriate living in that environment.

This is not to say that one account is better than the other, but it may be that the expatriate as the "outsider" to events may actually, to some degree be an "insider". Similarly, the local is an "insider", but the degree to which being "inside" is determined by levels of experience and involvement possibly makes the local an "outsider" at the same time. For example, a Malaitan commentator interpreting events from Honiara has an "insider's" perspective by virtue of being a Solomon Islander but he or she is also an

“outsider” to events in rural Guadalcanal. The expatriate living, working and travelling through rural Guadalcanal, on the other hand is an “outsider” by virtue of being expatriate but to some degree also an “insider” to events. It does not necessarily follow therefore that the term “insider” is exclusive to locals and “outsider” exclusive to expatriates: there are various levels and nuances that blur such a distinction.

2. Background to the Conflict

Before any examination of the conflict, I need to clarify the use of the word “ethnic”. There is a common perception among many Solomon Islanders, foreign journalists and writers alike that the conflict was predominantly ethnic in origin. While fought predominantly between two ethnic groups, labelling it purely “ethnic” obscures a host of complex causes and influences. Kabutaulaka for example, argues that ethnicity is only one factor among many influences. There is, he claims, a need to situate the crisis within broader socio-economic and political developments in Solomon Islands. Alone, “the ethnic discourse is too simplistic and cannot comprehensively explain the causes of the conflict, nor contribute effectively to its resolution”.¹⁷

While ethnicity is an important factor, it is only one among many to consider. Brown identifies three common interpretations of events ranging from an entirely “ethnic” interpretation favoured by the international media, entirely “economic”, favoured by the

⁴¹³ Kabutaulaka, *Beyond Ethnicity: The Political Economy of the Guadalcanal Crisis in Solomon Islands*, 2; Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka, *A Weak State and the Solomon Islands Peace Process*, East-West Center Working Papers, Pacific Islands Development Series (Honolulu: East-West Center, 2002), 4. Here he lists a number of underlying issues in the conflict including British administration colonial policy, and the failure of successive governments to address important socio-economic and political issues. Kabutaulaka’s work is important because he comes from one of the worst affected areas of the conflict, the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal. Similar views can also be found in other Melanesian writers including Lloyd Maepeza Gina, *Journeys in a Small Canoe: The Life and Times of a Solomon Islander*, ed. Judith A Bennett with Khylla J Russell (Canberra: The Australian National University, 2003), 270-285; Michael Maeliau, *Trouble in Paradise* (Honiara: Aroma Press, 2003), 12; Bird, "The Anatomy of the Crisis in Solomon Islands from a Theological Perspective," 53. Expatriate commentators who follow a similar line of thought include Sinclair Dinnen and Ian Scales, "Introduction: Conflict and Peacemaking in Solomon Islands" (paper presented at the Solomon Islands Workshop: Building Peace and Stability, Canberra, 24th-26th October 2001); *United Nations Common Country Assessment Solomon Islands*, 57; Sinclair Dinnen, "Political Chronicles: Winners and Losers: Politics and Disorder in the Solomon Islands 2000-2002," *Journal of Pacific History* 37, no. 3 (2002): 285; David Hegarty, "Peace Interventions in the South Pacific: Lessons from Bougainville and Solomon Islands" (paper presented at the Island State Security 2003 "Oceania at the Crossroads" Conference, Canberra, 15th-17th October 2003); Bennett, *Roots of Conflict in Solomon Islands Though Much Is Taken, Much Abides: Legacies of Tradition and Colonialism*, 11-12; Dinnen, "Guns, Money and Politics: Disorder in the Solomon Islands," 28; Benjamin Reilly, "Islands of Neglect," in *Arc of Instability? Melanesia in the Early 2000s*, ed. R J May, *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project* (Canberra: The Australian National University, 2003), 65.

political left, or the recent views of Australian policy makers who claim that Solomon Islands never had any form of effective government.¹⁸ All of these are important factors but when considered individually are too simplistic. There are, rather, a number of complex intertwined causes which, together, created the conditions for conflict to erupt. However, any detailed analysis of every cause would require a thesis of its own and is beyond the scope of this particular thesis. Hence, I shall only give a brief overview of at least some of the main factors that led to conflict.

2.1 Cultural Diversity and a National Consciousness

In chapter one I noted that Solomon Islands culture is not homogeneous. Instead there are significant differences of structure, beliefs and practices from region to region. Such a fragmented and diverse environment makes forging any kind of national consciousness or nation building difficult.¹⁹ A former Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, Solomon Mamaloni, once described the country as a “nation conceived but never born”.²⁰ Hilda Kii, echoes similar sentiments noting that there has never been a unifying factor to hold the society together and, when referring to the nation’s independence, remarked that although people celebrated and accepted it, it did not unify them.²¹ Expatriate writers such as Dureau and Dinnen would agree, Dureau noting that when the British created a protectorate over the islands in 1893, they were effectively lumping together diverse cultures and peoples with localized identities into a cobbled expression of European interests.²²

The result of cobbling together such diversity and localized identity is that according to Dinnen, even today, “There is little sense of unity binding the disparate communities

¹⁸ Brown, "The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands by Jon Fraenkel," 264.

¹⁹ Kabutaulaka, *Beyond Ethnicity: The Political Economy of the Guadalcanal Crisis in Solomon Islands*, 13; Kabutaulaka, *A Weak State and the Solomon Islands Peace Process*, 4-5.

²⁰ Cited in Kabutaulaka, *Beyond Ethnicity: The Political Economy of the Guadalcanal Crisis in Solomon Islands*, 13; Kabutaulaka, *A Weak State and the Solomon Islands Peace Process*, 4. See also Solomon Mamaloni, "The Road to Independence," in *Independence, Dependence, Interdependence: The First 10 Years of Solomon Islands Independence*, ed. Ron Crocombe and Esau Tuza (Suva: University of the South Pacific Honiara Centre, 1992), 7-18.

²¹ Kii, "The Ethnic Tension in Retrospect", 2.

²² Christine Dureau, "Decreed Affinities: Nationhood and the Western Solomon Islands," *Journal of Pacific History* 33, no. 2 (1998): 197.

scattered throughout the archipelago”.²³ The Transparency International report of 2004 stated that Solomon societies are highly insular, operate in small-scale units and have a high degree of social and economic self-reliance.²⁴ Dinnen argues further that the post-colonial state has little presence in the daily lives of Solomon Islanders. Rather, “Primary identities and allegiances remain implanted in language and kin-based associations rather than in abstracted notions of ‘nation’ and ‘citizenship’”.²⁵ Kabutaulaka agrees, arguing that any sense of national consciousness is often only skin deep, “peel that off and you have a person with allegiances to a particular ‘wantok’ or ethnic group”.²⁶ Ethnicity remains the primary form of allegiance.

2.2 Colonial Rule and Administration

A marked feature of the British colonial administration of Solomon Islands was a stress on centralizing social and economic development.²⁷ An example of this was, from around 1900 onwards, the establishment of large coconut plantations concentrated mainly in the central and western islands.²⁸ Such plantations, and the mobilization of populations to work in them, were supported by the colonial administration which, according to Hou, saw them as the means to meet the colonial government’s budgetary needs.²⁹

The effect of the plantation system on the islands was significant because it encouraged and, with the imposition of a head tax in 1920, forced considerable internal migration of

²³ Dinnen, "Guns, Money and Politics: Disorder in the Solomon Islands," 28.

²⁴ Paul Roughan, "National Integrity Systems Transparency International Country Study Report: Solomon Islands 2004." 7.

²⁵ Dinnen, "Guns, Money and Politics: Disorder in the Solomon Islands," 28.

²⁶ Kabutaulaka, *Beyond Ethnicity: The Political Economy of the Guadalcanal Crisis in Solomon Islands*, 16; Kabutaulaka, *A Weak State and the Solomon Islands Peace Process*, 5; *United Nations Common Country Assessment Solomon Islands*, 29. “Wantok” meaning “onetalk” is the term used to refer to those who speak the same language and to whom therefore you have allegiance and close identification. It is interesting that despite Jourdan’s argument for a national consciousness in Chapter One, most of the Melanesian authors cited here are not convinced.

²⁷ Liloqula and Pollard, *Understanding Conflict in Solomon Islands: A Practical Means to Peacemaking*, 1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 4

²⁹ Hou, "People of Solomon Islands: From the Past to the Present," 25; George A Takeli, "Towards a Model of Reconciliation: A Study of the Understanding of Reconciliation in Ephesians Chapter 2 and Its Implication in the Context of the Ethnic Conflict in Solomon Islands" (M.Th. Thesis, University of Auckland, 2003), 64.

young men from their own islands to the plantations.³⁰ Importantly many plantations were located on Guadalcanal but the majority of labourers were from Malaita, the most densely populated island in the Solomons.³¹ In addition, while many labourers returned to their home villages and islands on completion of their contracts, there were cases of labourers making new friends outside their kin-groups, marrying into them and settling there.³² Hogbin appears to have observed this among the Koaka of Guadalcanal, noting that strangers in a village were mostly ex-labourers who had served their term of employment, become friendly with local villagers and been adopted into the village, with villagers signifying their acceptance of them by working out pseudo-kinship ties.³³

The internal migration of Solomon Islanders increased considerably in the 1950s and 1960s after the relocation of the National capital from Tulagi, which was all but destroyed in the Second World War, to Honiara on the northern coast of Guadalcanal. Honiara grew rapidly, initially as an expatriate settlement and labourers arrived in large numbers to work on construction projects, the majority coming from Malaita.³⁴ According to Fraenkel, while Honiara developed, many of the new industries and business ventures were “usually large scale, foreign-owned and managed ventures, reliant on migrant labour from Malaita”.³⁵ Commercial development centred on Honiara and much of the grant aid generated from the Commonwealth Development and Welfare Project and the British Government’s grants-in-aid went into strengthening the colonial government, again concentrated on Honiara.³⁶ Consequently, development centred on a small part of Guadalcanal, leaving the rest of the island along with others, including Malaita, significantly underdeveloped.

³⁰ Hou, "People of Solomon Islands: From the Past to the Present," 25; Takeli, "Towards a Model of Reconciliation: A Study of the Understanding of Reconciliation in Ephesians Chapter 2 and Its Implication in the Context of the Ethnic Conflict in Solomon Islands", 64.

³¹ Fraenkel argues that of the 54,110 recruits who left their home islands to work on plantations between 1913 and 1940, Malaita provided around 68% compared to 15% Guadalcanal, 6% Makira and 5% Temotu. See Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 27.

³² Judith A Bennett, *Wealth of the Solomons: A History of a Pacific Archipelago 1800-1978*, Pacific Monograph Series No. 3 (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1987), 190; Takeli, "Towards a Model of Reconciliation: A Study of the Understanding of Reconciliation in Ephesians Chapter 2 and Its Implication in the Context of the Ethnic Conflict in Solomon Islands", 64.

³³ Hogbin, *A Guadalcanal Society: The Kaoka Speakers*, 5-6.

³⁴ Bennett, *Roots of Conflict in Solomon Islands Though Much Is Taken, Much Abides: Legacies of Tradition and Colonialism*, 6.

³⁵ Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 33.

³⁶ *Ibid*; Bennett, *Wealth of the Solomons: A History of a Pacific Archipelago 1800-1978*, 313.

Another consequence was, Fraenkel argues, that the attitudes of indigenous Guadalcanal people towards Honiara remained ambivalent. Honiara's limited connections to rural Guadalcanal, limited investment in rural schools and clinics, and indigenous Guadalcanal people having a limited stake in urban post-war development led to them regarding it "as an alien community in which the interests of non-indigenes are paramount".³⁷ Writing in 1970, Bellam noted that, "As yet Honiara has had only relatively limited catalytic effect on village Guadalcanal... Indigenous identification with, and commitment to, the capital remains marginal".³⁸

2.3 Land

Early migrants to Honiara settled initially on government owned land but, as this was limited, demand very quickly outstripped supply.³⁹ Consequently, migrants began to buy customary land from indigenous Guadalcanal people. This was problematic because although, as Kii argues, there are traditional practices that govern the selling of land, (Guadalcanal land ownership is matrilineal), often men were "selling" land without consulting other members of the tribe.⁴⁰ This caused resentment, particularly among the younger generation who feared being dispossessed of their inheritance.⁴¹

The situation was complicated further by the different traditions relating to inheritance of the cultural groups. While Guadalcanal inheritance is matrilineal, Malaita is patrilineal and Malaitan settlers on Guadalcanal maintained this patrilineal bias. The results could be complex; for example, if a Malaitan man had married a Guadalcanal woman he could, in effect, inherit land from both sides.⁴² In addition to buying

³⁷Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 33-34. Fraenkel here is quoting Bellam's paper on Honiara the colonial city. See M E P Bellam, "The Colonial City: Honiara, a Pacific Islands' Case Study," *Pacific Viewpoint* 11, no. 1 (1970): 93-94.

³⁸Bellam, "The Colonial City: Honiara, a Pacific Islands' Case Study," 93.

³⁹ *United Nations Common Country Assessment Solomon Islands*, 52.

⁴⁰ Kii, "The Ethnic Tension in Retrospect", 2. This was also confirmed to me by a Guadalcanal man who listed ways in which land could be sold to outsiders. See also Kabutaulaka, *Beyond Ethnicity: The Political Economy of the Guadalcanal Crisis in Solomon Islands*, 14-15.

⁴¹ Dinnen, "Guns, Money and Politics: Disorder in the Solomon Islands," 29; Kabutaulaka, *Beyond Ethnicity: The Political Economy of the Guadalcanal Crisis in Solomon Islands*, 15; Bennett, *Roots of Conflict in Solomon Islands Though Much Is Taken, Much Abides: Legacies of Tradition and Colonialism*, 8; Bird, "The Anatomy of the Crisis in Solomon Islands from a Theological Perspective," 53.

⁴² Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 95.

customary land, other settlers simply squatted illegally on both customary and government-owned land.

2.4 Independence

Some commentators argue that a major reason for the conflict is, “a premature and excessively hasty British decolonisation”.⁴³ For example, O’Callaghan argues:

...the Solomon Islands on July 7th 1978 was thrust out into the real world. But vast social economic and political changes were demanded of this island country in order to craft itself into a viable nation after just 85 years of British colonialism. But little in the way of guidance, education, resources or capital was provided to its 300,000 or so people.⁴⁴

Education in particular is identified as a major failure of the colonial administration. Bennett argues that while the post-war emphasis had been on establishing basic primary education, because independence did not enter Britain’s thinking until the 1960s, there was little time to extend education to secondary and tertiary levels. Consequently, by independence, there were only six secondary schools, including only one government school and a dozen or so university graduates.⁴⁵ Solomon Islands politicians and leaders seem to be of the same opinion including Sir Baddeley Devesi, the first Governor-General of Solomon Islands, who argues that Britain did not adequately prepare the nation for independence. He claims it was in 1971, only seven years before independence, that Britain became serious about training local officers for the public service, giving them crash courses in Public Administration.⁴⁶ Francis Saemala, a veteran politician from the period, argues that six months before independence only one senior civil servant was sent to Australia for a short training course in international

⁴³Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 8; Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 35.

⁴⁴ Mary Louise O’Callaghan, "Solomons Crisis Dates Back to Hasty British Handover," *The New Zealand Herald*, http://www.nzherald.co.nz/section/2/story.cfm?c_id=2&objectid=3511263.

⁴⁵ Bennett, *Roots of Conflict in Solomon Islands Though Much Is Taken, Much Abides: Legacies of Tradition and Colonialism*, 7. O’Callaghan claims the figure was only five. See O’Callaghan, "Solomons Crisis Dates Back to Hasty British Handover."

⁴⁶ Baddeley Devesi, "Independence or Dependence," in *Independence, Dependence, Interdependence: The First 10 Years of Solomon Islands Independence*, ed. Ron Crocombe and Esau Tuza (Honiara: Institute of Pacific Studies, USP Honiara Centre, 1992), 5.

politics and economics.⁴⁷ Consequently, Kingmele and Paroi argue that independence was given to Solomon Islands as a commodity manufactured in Great Britain and imported to a context where there was very little knowledge of its ingredients.⁴⁸ The British Westminster system of politics had been gradually phased in since the 1960's, but at best it was seen as a "novel, if not exotic" institution and at worst was not understood.⁴⁹ Perhaps this is no surprise when the Westminster system, which has taken hundreds of years to evolve in the British context, is transplanted over the top of already established and quite different Melanesian systems of leadership.⁵⁰

The independence constitution of 1978 also remained controversial. Not only did it not meet the demands of Guadalcanal, Santa Isabel and the Western and Eastern Districts for devolution, but Britain insisted on a fully democratic constitution as the basis for political independence.⁵¹ An important part of this constitution was freedom of movement as a democratic right which allowed Solomon Islands citizens to move freely and reside in any part of the country. This meant the opportunity to move freely outside of tribal, land and blood ties which, in itself, caused a radical shift in inter-island relations.⁵² The result has been an even more rapid increase of people migrating to the capital and, among other things, "the expansion of squatter settlements in Guadalcanal Province".⁵³

According to a recent UN report, "the nascent concerns of Guadalcanal people about outsiders seeking to enter their lightly populated island were brushed aside".⁵⁴

⁴⁷ Francis Saemala, "Foreign Relations 1978-1988," Ibid. (Institute of Pacific Studies USP Honiara Centre), 19. Saemala is also quoted in O'Callaghan echoing similar sentiments. See O'Callaghan, "Solomons Crisis Dates Back to Hasty British Handover."

⁴⁸ Edward Kingmele and Henry Paroi, "Political Trends in the Solomon Islands," in *Politics in Papua New Guinea: Continuities, Changes and Challenges*, ed. Michael A Rynkiewich and Roland Seib, *Point Series No. 24* (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 2000), 241.

⁴⁹ Bennett, *Roots of Conflict in Solomon Islands Though Much Is Taken, Much Abides: Legacies of Tradition and Colonialism*, 7; Kingmele and Paroi, "Political Trends in the Solomon Islands," 241.

⁵⁰ Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 11.

⁵¹ Ibid; *United Nations Common Country Assessment Solomon Islands*, 52.

⁵² Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 37; *United Nations Common Country Assessment Solomon Islands*, 53; Liloqula and Pollard, *Understanding Conflict in Solomon Islands: A Practical Means to Peacemaking*, 2.

⁵³ Liloqula and Pollard, *Understanding Conflict in Solomon Islands: A Practical Means to Peacemaking*, 2.

⁵⁴ *United Nations Common Country Assessment Solomon Islands*, 52.

2.5 Post-Independence Politics

The Westminster political system “characterized by strong political parties based on large followings, competition for leadership in government and a well-established system of checks and balances” was adopted in Solomon Islands.⁵⁵ However there were significant problems, stemming principally from a tension between the traditional Melanesian systems of personal or “big-man” politics, prevalent on some islands, and the adopted foreign system.⁵⁶ It appears that, at least in some cases, the big-man system continues to operate in the new political system and the modern state. For example, as Alasia noted, just before the 1984 elections most of the rural population of Solomon Islands did not vote for candidates according to party politics, philosophies or ideologies but on the basis of performance and what he or she had achieved for the local area in initiating or overseeing community projects such as water supplies, roads and so on.⁵⁷ In addition, the big-man is expected to distribute wealth, contribute to traditional feasting and cultural events and help with payment of school fees, fares or accommodation.⁵⁸

This, argues Alasia, creates difficulties in developing a party system where people vote for policies of national significance. The individual candidate or member will concern him or herself with issues of local interest at the expense of national concerns or stable national leadership. Members elected to parliament are, to some extent, a number of big-men competing against each other for a share in government expenditure and primarily for their respective local interests as and against each other.⁵⁹ As Hou points out, the political party system in Solomon Islands is not often organized along left/right ideological lines; rather it is, according to Steeves, a form of “unbounded politics, based on the weaving together of fragile power bases that draw on personal allegiances”.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Kingmele and Paroi, "Political Trends in the Solomon Islands," 241.

⁵⁶ Sam Alasia, "Politics," in *Ples Blong Iumi: Solomon Islands the Past Four Thousand Years*, ed. Hugh Laracy (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1989), 150.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁵⁸ *United Nations Common Country Assessment Solomon Islands*, 30-31.

⁵⁹ Alasia, "Politics," 150-151. See also John Roughan, "Solomons' Weak Electoral System Links into the Nation's Social Unrest," (2004),

http://www.usp.ac.fj/fileadmin/files/Institutes/piasdg/Electoral_Systems_2004/es2004_Roughan.pdf.

⁶⁰ Hou, "People of Solomon Islands: From the Past to the Present," 31. Steeves is cited in Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 38, 43; Jim Sandoms, "Logging in the Solomon Islands-the Lost Legacy," European Tropical Forest Research Network, http://www.etfrn.org/etfrn/newsletter/news4344/nl43_oip_6.htm.

The lack of a real ideological base for political parties, coupled with the fact that people tend to vote for individuals and not parties, leads to the political situation being fluid and volatile.⁶¹ In effect political parties become, “useful vehicles on the road to power; but if one breaks down, or if a better vehicle is passing, quick change is normal”.⁶² The member as a big-man has to provide for his local community and the political party becomes the means to do so. In such a context, political party allegiances are not particularly important, hence quick change and members crossing the floor are common occurrences, not because a member has changed his or her ideological perspective, but because he sees his new party as a better avenue to obtain concrete material results for his own community.⁶³

In addition, although the Westminster system operates in Solomon Islands, the election of a Prime Minister departs from the convention. Instead of the Head of State requesting the leader of a party with a majority to form a government, the new Parliament meets and chooses a Prime Minister by direct election. This often means a succession of ballots in which the lowest polling candidates are eliminated until one candidate secures a majority of votes. This adds to the fluidity of the political system as personal and party allegiances frequently change in the build-up to voting.⁶⁴ The result of such pressures on the political system is that Solomon Islands has a history of political instability. Since 1978, the nation has had seven Prime Ministers and eleven governments and only two of them have survived the four-year term.⁶⁵ The result of such a fluid and volatile climate is that government ministers tend to put their own short-term interests and maintaining their own position before the interests of the country, while other

⁶¹ Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 42.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ See Mark Otter, ed., *Solomon Islands Human Development Report 2002: Building a Nation*, vol. 1: Main Report (Windsor, Queensland: Government of Solomon Islands, 2002), 29; Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 39.

⁶⁴ Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 136; Y Ghai, "The Making of the Independence Constitution," in *Solomon Islands Politics*, ed. P Larmour and S Tarua (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1983), 32-33.

⁶⁵ Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 42; Otter, ed., *Solomon Islands Human Development Report 2002: Building a Nation*, 29; United Nations Common Country Assessment Solomon Islands, 30; Kingmele and Paroi, "Political Trends in the Solomon Islands," 244.

parliamentarians are concerned with trying to become ministers.⁶⁶ This leads to poor continuity and development as the short-term takes precedence.⁶⁷

Consequently, such governments appear “inefficient in terms of their obligation to deliver services to the citizens and leads to widespread dissatisfaction with the political system”.⁶⁸ This, when added to the poor performances of consecutive governments has, argues Dinnen, fuelled “growing levels of popular disenchantment with the formal political process and, in many provincial islands, in a spread of autonomy sentiments”.⁶⁹

The growing sense of frustration coupled with a population rate among the highest in the world and which has outpaced growth in the economy, has led to a young and rapidly growing population impeded by unemployment and limited economic opportunities.⁷⁰ Consequently, many disenfranchised young people who do not receive any benefits from leaders or politicians turn to other means to gain a share.⁷¹ Bennett argues that the conflict is a symptom of years of political instability that alienates many who receive no benefit and whose standard of living and future prospects remain low. The result is a conflict that gives the disaffected a cause to fight for, an excuse to focus on, a target near at hand that personified all that seemed to have gone wrong, to validate their social worth.⁷²

3. Frustration Grows

As Honiara continued to grow and migrant workers flowed in, concern over the migration process was being expressed. As early as 1957 it was recorded that: “The worst fear the Tasimboko people [of North Guadalcanal] have is in regard to the immigration of Malaita people.”⁷³ Writing in 1989, Alasia argued that “the new

⁶⁶ Otter, ed., *Solomon Islands Human Development Report 2002: Building a Nation*, 29.

⁶⁷ Ibid; Kingmele and Paroi, "Political Trends in the Solomon Islands," 244.

⁶⁸ Kingmele and Paroi, "Political Trends in the Solomon Islands," 244.

⁶⁹ Dinnen, "Guns, Money and Politics: Disorder in the Solomon Islands," 29; Otter, ed., *Solomon Islands Human Development Report 2002: Building a Nation*, 15.

⁷⁰ Dinnen, "Guns, Money and Politics: Disorder in the Solomon Islands," 29.

⁷¹ Bennett, *Roots of Conflict in Solomon Islands Though Much Is Taken, Much Abides: Legacies of Tradition and Colonialism*, 14.

⁷² Ibid

⁷³ Cited in *United Nations Common Country Assessment Solomon Islands*, 52. See also Kabutaulaka, *A Weak State and the Solomon Islands Peace Process*, 9.

migration remains a matter of widespread and serious concern”.⁷⁴ At that stage, Malaitan settlers were found in all parts of the country and substantial “Malaita” villages had sprung up on Guadalcanal, the Western Province and Central Province, not to mention eight “squatter” settlements around Honiara.

Settlers were able to “buy” land from Guadalcanal people and entered into various legal purchases and leasing arrangements.⁷⁵ Such agreements, however, could be vague and uncertain. In some cases land ownership was unregistered, land boundaries were uncertain and settlers could enter into “informal arrangements” with landowners for land-use rights. These “informal arrangements” could consist of supplying labour, retail goods or assisting with custom feasts and/or festivals. In other cases where payments were made, there was often no official exchange of deeds or formal title.⁷⁶ The sense of resentment among young Guadalcanal men who saw their birthright sold off to outsiders would only grow when the migrant numbers began to extend beyond the original agreement.⁷⁷

Because of the strong kinship and extended family relationships of Solomon Islanders, settler numbers quickly grew into “settlements”. The first settlers would establish themselves, find a job in Honiara, for example, and build a house. Eventually over time, more relatives would arrive and establish themselves on the land and so the one house became a hamlet and then a substantial settlement or village.⁷⁸ Consequently, many local Guadalcanal people found themselves in competition with increasing numbers of settlers who very often went beyond the land boundaries of the original agreement. When, for example, young unemployed Guadalcanal people needed garden land, they often found it earmarked or in the possession of Malaitan settlers, particularly on north Guadalcanal and around Honiara where settlements had been established both legally and illegally.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Sam Alasia, "Population Movement," in *Ples Blong Iumi: Solomon Islands the Past Four Thousand Years*, ed. Hugh Laracy (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1989), 118.

⁷⁵ Bennett, *Roots of Conflict in Solomon Islands Though Much Is Taken, Much Abides: Legacies of Tradition and Colonialism*, 8.

⁷⁶ Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 57.

⁷⁷ Bennett, *Roots of Conflict in Solomon Islands Though Much Is Taken, Much Abides: Legacies of Tradition and Colonialism*, 8.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

3.1 The Moro Movement

In 1959 Chief Pelise Moro of Makaruka village on the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal, is reported to have had a vision which eventually led to the creation of the Moro movement.⁸⁰ Moro advocated a return to “traditional” culture and the preservation of “traditional” custom. The movement seemed to embody an inherent frustration with the colonial administration over lack of development and resources on the Weather Coast and, according to Moore, promoted custom as an idyllic pre-colonial way of life and as a form of resistance to the administration.⁸¹ A customhouse was built in the centre of the village and people were urged to discard their European clothing for traditional style dress.⁸² The movement grew quickly throughout the 1960s and beyond provoking the administration into increasing its technical assistance to the Weather Coast but the movement was also expressing concern that “the boundaries of the land of Honiara [are] still moving into the land of the natives”.⁸³

The Moro movement appears to have been an influence on the later Guadalcanal militants. Their name *Isatabu* was inherited from the movement, not to mention that many militants wore traditional loin cloths or *kabilato*, covered their faces with ashes, bore “traditional” weapons and favoured a return to “traditional” rituals and practices as a form of Guadalcanal identity, all associated with the Moro movement.⁸⁴

3.2 Unhelpful Stereotypes

As the migrants settled and established themselves, some worked in Honiara and on the various large-scale development projects on Guadalcanal; others developed their own agricultural projects and were in competition with the locals as both sought to sell their produce in Honiara. Another area of contention was access to local schools. Places were limited and, again, it seemed that locals had to compete with settlers for places in

⁸⁰ Fugui and Butu, "Religion," 89.

⁸¹ Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 97.

⁸² Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 322.

⁸³ Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 32; Hou, "People of Solomon Islands: From the Past to the Present," 27.

⁸⁴ Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 54-55.

schools on their own island.⁸⁵ In addition, it appeared, at least on the surface, that Malaitan settlers were more successful and industrious than their Guadalcanal counterparts.

This helped to perpetuate a common perception among expatriates, foreign commentators and Solomon Islanders that Malaitans are more enterprising, resourceful and forceful in character than people of other islands. Kabutaulaka, for example, cites the February 1999 edition of *The Islands Business* which describes Malaitans as “particularly industrious people with sharp business acumen...competitive in a society in which people from other islands tend to be less so”.⁸⁶ The reasons for such perceptions may stem from the fact that Malaitans simply make up the majority of the population, and due to the population pressures and lack of development on Malaita, have moved to the better-resourced Guadalcanal. Another factor was that Malaitans dominated the colonial plantation workforce and acquired a reputation there for being hard-working. Alongside this perception is another, identified by Kabutaulaka, that Guadalcanal people tend to be lazy, not business minded, uncompetitive and placid.⁸⁷

Such perceptions are stereotypes that reinforce the cultural traits of both peoples and the stereotype begins to shape the reality. Kii argues that it had been taken for granted that Guadalcanal people were non-aggressive and passive and would simply accept being dominated by another cultural group. This was a dangerous assumption that led to misunderstanding and conflict.⁸⁸

Perhaps more importantly however was the reputation that Malaitans acquired of being somehow more aggressive or dangerous than other Solomon Islanders. Bennett notes that this reputation existed among the plantation workforces, with planters considering Malaitans tough to deal with and other island groups tended to tread lightly around them

⁸⁵ Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 323.

⁸⁶ Kabutaulaka, *Beyond Ethnicity: The Political Economy of the Guadalcanal Crisis in Solomon Islands*, 9.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Kii, "The Ethnic Tension in Retrospect", 3. Former Guadalcanal militant leader, George Gray, notes that some in Honiara found it hard to believe that Guadalcanal people could start a violent uprising because they were stereotyped as being passive. See Tanis and Gray, "In Between: Personal Experiences in the 9-Year Long Conflict on Bougainville and Habuna Momoruqu (the Blood of My Island) Violence and the Guadalcanal Uprising in Solomon Islands."

because of Malaitan sensitivity to slights against their customs.⁸⁹ Perhaps this, coupled with the Kwaio killing of tax collector William Bell in 1927, is a reason for the current widely held belief that Malaitans are naturally more aggressive than other Solomon Islanders.⁹⁰ According to Kii, fear of Malaitans has existed among Guadalcanal people as far back as one could remember. As long ago as 1908, Guadalcanal landowners were unwilling to sell land to plantation companies, not only because the Melanesian Mission had strongly discouraged its followers from selling land to Europeans, but also because they were apparently “apprehensive of an influx of Malaitan plantation labourers”.⁹¹

In 1980, Paul Tavoia was raising concerns about migration in parliament noting that “certain of the migrants did not show respect for the host’s culture” and this was portrayed as one of the main grievances of Guadalcanal people.⁹² Guadalcanal militant leader, George Gray, cites disrespect of Malaitan settlers towards Guadalcanal customs, desecration of cultural sites, and settlement of land without permission as major reasons for his joining the militant group. Former government Minister and Guadalcanal leader Sethel Kelly claimed that, “These migrants showed no respect for Guadalcanal customs and many times imposed their customs on Guadalcanalese in solving social problems that might have risen between them”.⁹³

Kabutaulaka argues that some Malaitans have come to accept the “myth” that they are somehow more aggressive or dangerous than other Solomon Islanders and therefore act

⁸⁹ Bennett, *Roots of Conflict in Solomon Islands Though Much Is Taken, Much Abides: Legacies of Tradition and Colonialism*, 4.

⁹⁰ Kabutaulaka, *Beyond Ethnicity: The Political Economy of the Guadalcanal Crisis in Solomon Islands*, 14-15. Here Kabutaulaka argues how the murder of Bell has become an event introduced into the secondary school curriculum but that killings by other Solomon Islander groups have not received the same attention. The result, he claims, is the creation of a myth that Malaitans are naturally more aggressive than other Solomon Islanders. See also James Boutillier, "Killing the Government: Imperial Policy and the Pacification of Malaita," in *The Pacification of Melanesia*, ed. Margaret Rodman and Matthew Cooper (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1979), 48-49.

⁹¹ Kii, "The Ethnic Tension in Retrospect", 2; Bennett, *Wealth of the Solomons: A History of a Pacific Archipelago 1800-1978*, 135.

⁹² Cited in Alasia, "Population Movement," 119.

⁹³ Cited in Cliff Wilson Tarimure, "The Role of Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA) and the Melanesian Brotherhood in the Ethnic Tension before the Townsville Peace Agreement" (Diploma of Theology Thesis, Bishop Patteson Theological College, Kohimarama, Solomon Islands, 2002), 3-4. Wale notes the aggressive assistance of Malaitans upon the application of Malaitan customs wherever they settle, which becomes a threat to the local customs of communities. This, he claims, was one reason why the rest of the country was, overall, sympathetic to the Guadalcanal cause. See Matthew Wale, "The Solomon Islands Peace Process-Made in Townsville, Made for Unsustainability," *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project Workshop Papers* (2001), http://rspas.anu.edu.au/papers/melanesia/conference_papers/2001/06_Solomons-Wale.pdf.

aggressively. Some Malaitans use the island name or region “Kwaio” or “North”, for example, to instil fear in any confrontation with another group. *Mi man blong Malaita*, (I’m from Malaita), is a term used to frighten others. This perception of Malaitan aggressiveness appears to be common among Solomon Islanders, who often describe Malaitans as being “different” or of “different blood”. Maeliau, a Malaitan himself, observes that:

...domination and aggressiveness has been, in general, the way other people view Malaitans whether the Malaitans themselves agree with it or not. Wherever Malaitans were found as a group away from home for whatever reason, they tended to display these characteristics.⁹⁴

There were examples of acts of aggression and murders committed by Malaitans on Guadalcanal, the most notorious being the murder of three sleeping villagers from Barana village, Mount Austin, by four Malaitans in 1988, allegedly in payback for the killing of a Kwaio man. These murders were among a number committed on Guadalcanal during the 1980s and 1990s, some remaining unsolved.⁹⁵ Even though Moore claims that Malaitans, hired by Guadalcanalese for payback killings among their own people, may have committed some of these murders, perceived Malaitan violence became a factor in anti-Malaitan sentiments which began to spread across Guadalcanal.⁹⁶

3.3 National vs. Local Development

As Honiara continued to develop and facilities improved, rural Guadalcanal saw little change or improvement in basic education, health and road access. According to a United Nations report, Guadalcanal landowners, “had contributed resources for national development but did not see a proportion of these benefits being shared with them in terms of improved services”.⁹⁷ Two major examples of this were Solomon Islands

⁹⁴ Maeliau, *Trouble in Paradise*, 26.

⁹⁵ Bennett, *Wealth of the Solomons: A History of a Pacific Archipelago 1800-1978*, 323; Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 45; Tarimure, "The Role of Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA) and the Melanesian Brotherhood in the Ethnic Tension before the Townsville Peace Agreement", 2.

⁹⁶ Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 104.

⁹⁷ *United Nations Common Country Assessment Solomon Islands*, 53.

Plantation Limited (SIPL) and Gold Ridge Mining Limited. SIPL, a major oil palm plantation based on the Guadalcanal plains, had been established in 1970, with 68% of its shares owned by the Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC), 30% by Solomon Islands Government and a mere 2% by Guadalcanal landowners.⁹⁸ In 1997 the Ulufa'alu government proposed to sell 20% of its share to the CDC and 10% to Solomon Islanders, however, Guadalcanal Province demanded that the shares be sold to them. The government gave no positive reply, which appeared to fuel the growing discontent.⁹⁹

In early 1998, Australian company Ross Mining Limited opened a gold mine east of Honiara. Although the mine had an agreement with local landowners to employ local workers and to construct a new village, school, clinic and church, Malaitans made up a large number of the workforce including many senior staff positions.¹⁰⁰

The perception among some local Guadalcanal leaders and landowners seemed to be that profits from the mine were going to both the mining company and Solomon Islands Government but not towards the development or people of Guadalcanal.¹⁰¹ This simply added to the growing concerns as former Guadalcanal militant leader Andrew Te'e put it:

...there is a trend occurring world wide where many indigenous and original owners of land have been forced to shift away from 'living' life to simply 'surviving' it. This shift occurs when the original owners of land are marginalized in the name of 'development' for the benefit of the nation-state. The shift is caused by government policies and legislation as well as the actions of huge corporate industries that do not respect the land and those who originally belong to it.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Kabutaulaka, *Beyond Ethnicity: The Political Economy of the Guadalcanal Crisis in Solomon Islands*, 14. See also Bird, "The Anatomy of the Crisis in Solomon Islands from a Theological Perspective," 60.

⁹⁹ Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 105; Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka, "Solomon Islands," *The Contemporary Pacific* 11, no. 2 (1999): 99.

¹⁰⁰ Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 104; Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 49.

¹⁰¹ Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 323.

¹⁰² Cited in Kabutaulaka, *Beyond Ethnicity: The Political Economy of the Guadalcanal Crisis in Solomon Islands*, 15; Bird, "The Anatomy of the Crisis in Solomon Islands from a Theological Perspective," 60.

3.4 The Bougainville Conflict

In the late 1980s, a civil war broke out on the island of Bougainville between a militant group calling itself the Bougainville Revolutionary Army and the Papua New Guinea Government. Although the causes of this conflict were complex, two major factors were a dispute over the control of mining revenues and Bougainville's independence from Papua New Guinea control.¹⁰³

During the 1990's large numbers of Bougainvilleans fled the fighting into Solomon Islands, with many residing on Guadalcanal for long periods, while members of the BRA regularly crossed the border in search of supplies, wartime weaponry and ammunition.¹⁰⁴ There are, according to Kii, cultural similarities between the Bougainvilleans and Guadalcanal people particularly in that both have matrilineal systems of descent.¹⁰⁵ Guadalcanal people also observed the effectiveness of the BRA's armed resistance and local militia and how they were able to force the closure of the world's largest copper mine and force the company off their land.¹⁰⁶ The Bougainville conflict also had significant impact on Solomon Islanders' own access to weaponry, as knowledge of how to make homemade pipe guns spread, possibly by Bougainvilleans on Guadalcanal.¹⁰⁷ Guns were already being smuggled from the Western Province to

¹⁰³ Bennett, *Roots of Conflict in Solomon Islands Though Much Is Taken, Much Abides: Legacies of Tradition and Colonialism*, 8-9.

¹⁰⁴ According to Tara, upwards of 9,000 Bougainvilleans fled into Solomon Islands with the majority settling in Guadalcanal for long periods of time. See Kabutaulaka, *Beyond Ethnicity: The Political Economy of the Guadalcanal Crisis in Solomon Islands*, 16; Bennett, *Roots of Conflict in Solomon Islands Though Much Is Taken, Much Abides: Legacies of Tradition and Colonialism*, 8; Dureau, "Decreed Affinities: Nationhood and the Western Solomon Islands," 197; Sasako, "Rebuilding a Battered Solomon Islands", 8.

¹⁰⁵ Kii, "The Ethnic Tension in Retrospect", 4. Haruwae, writing in 1997, compares the opening of the Gold Ridge mine on Guadalcanal with that of Bougainville, noting that none of the signatures on the mining agreement are from Guadalcanal women. The views of women, who should have the final say over land in a matrilineal society are not heard. As she notes: "The presence of Bougainville women on our soil are a clear warning about what happens when mining takes place". This warning proved, to some extent, to be prophetic. See Lisa Haruwe, "The Solomons and the Bougainville Crisis," *Pacific Journal of Theology*, no. 18 (1997): 49.

¹⁰⁶ Kii, "The Ethnic Tension in Retrospect", 4; Kabutaulaka, *Beyond Ethnicity: The Political Economy of the Guadalcanal Crisis in Solomon Islands*, 16; Bennett, *Roots of Conflict in Solomon Islands Though Much Is Taken, Much Abides: Legacies of Tradition and Colonialism*, 8.

¹⁰⁷ Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 68.

Bougainville and Prime Minister Mamaloni had been importing high-powered weapons into the country in case of any conflict with the BRA.¹⁰⁸

4. Frustration Erupts

According to Kabutaulaka, a group of disgruntled Guadalcanal men had been stockpiling weapons since 1996 but events came to a head in 1998.¹⁰⁹ According to various accounts a meeting was held on 14th March 1998, either at Visale village or the nearby Tambea Resort on West Guadalcanal, attended by leading Guadalcanal figures such as former Prime Minister Ezekiel Alebua, Sethel Kelly, senior police officer John Gatu and around 200 Guadalcanal people.¹¹⁰ They agreed, it is alleged, to “force all Malaitans off Guadalcanal and restore Guale ownership and control over the province”.¹¹¹

4.1 The Isatabu Freedom Movement

In late 1998, indigenous Guadalcanal men began attacking Malaitan settlements on northeast Guadalcanal. This was the beginning of a concerted campaign to push Malaitan settlers off Guadalcanal by militants calling themselves the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army. Later the name changed to the Isatabu Freedom Fighters and

¹⁰⁸ Bennett, *Roots of Conflict in Solomon Islands Though Much Is Taken, Much Abides: Legacies of Tradition and Colonialism*, 9. Dureau argues that in 1994 the Mamaloni government was intending to establish a military force largely to police the border between Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea at the height of the Bougainville conflict. According to Moore in February 1998 Ulufa’alu learnt that his predecessor, Mamaloni, had ordered US arms, ammunition, two aircraft and a helicopter gunship for use on the border with Papua New Guinea. Ulufa’alu asked Australia and New Zealand to impound the weapons and only three boxes actually reached Honiara. See Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 101. On the other hand a UN report states that how many of those arms reached Solomon Islands is unknown. See *United Nations Common Country Assessment Solomon Islands*, 54. See also "Solomon Islands Minister Says Arms Stored in New Zealand Belongs to the Government," *Pacific Islands Development Program* (1999), <http://archives.pireport.org/archive/1999/june/06-10-09.html>.

¹⁰⁹ Kabutaulaka, *Beyond Ethnicity: The Political Economy of the Guadalcanal Crisis in Solomon Islands*, 2-3.

¹¹⁰ Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 105. Moore claims the meeting was held at Visale. Nori claims Tambea resort. Also according to Nori both future militant leaders Harold Keke and Joseph Sangu were also in attendance. Nori’s account, however, is likely to be partial due to his position as spokesman for the Malaita Eagle Force. See Andrew G H Nori, "5th June 2000 in Perspective," <http://www.sibconline.com.sb/Analysis%20archive.asp>.

¹¹¹ Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 47; Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 105; Nori, "5th June 2000 in Perspective."

again to the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM), “Isatabu” being a traditional name for Guadalcanal.

Initially the militant group was small but quickly grew in number and there was some considerable uncertainty over who exactly they were, who they represented and what they wanted, fuelling an initial conspiracy theory that they were politically motivated by opportunist politicians.¹¹² However, militant leader Gray argues that the objectives of those involved was clear:

1. to chase settlers out of Guadalcanal, especially Malaitans;
2. to payback for the Guadalcanal people murdered since the establishment of Honiara;
3. to ensure that Guadalcanal Province and people benefit equitably from the income that they contribute to the state;
4. to ensure that settlers respect the local people and their cultures.¹¹³

It appeared that the IFM did have a “cause” and objectives but Carter claims, that at least initially, many young people simply joined for the excitement of it, particularly those aged 14-30, many of whom had little status within their own villages and little formal education or work prospects.¹¹⁴ In addition, Carter adds that the group seemed to have a syncretic mix of influences: there was a return to the traditional warrior culture and custom, members wore *kabilato* (traditional loin cloths) and there were rumours of their adopting traditional cultural practices, sacrificing to ancestors and using magic to

¹¹² Richard A Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities," (The Melanesian Brotherhood, 2003), A:2; Tanis and Gray, "In Between: Personal Experiences in the 9-Year Long Conflict on Bougainville and Habuna Momoruqu (the Blood of My Island) Violence and the Guadalcanal Uprising in Solomon Islands." Carter has written three papers, confusingly with the same title. The first (2003) is an unpublished paper, the second was presented at a contextual theology conference in 2004 and the third was published as a journal article in 2005. The papers are also different, with material appearing in the first paper not appearing in the others. I will therefore differentiate them using for the 2003 paper the letter A, 2004 B and 2005 C.

¹¹³ Tanis and Gray, "In Between: Personal Experiences in the 9-Year Long Conflict on Bougainville and Habuna Momoruqu (the Blood of My Island) Violence and the Guadalcanal Uprising in Solomon Islands." Although the last objective is curious. How were settlers to respect the local people if they had already been chased out under the first?

¹¹⁴ Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities," A: 2.

gain power.¹¹⁵ Gray explains that this was indeed the case, as pigs were sacrificed to ancestral spirits to defend the militants from enemies and special betel nut limes and clubs were blessed and used as weapons to weaken and confuse enemy soldiers.¹¹⁶ This appeared to be partly a revival of the Moro movement but with a forceful assertion of Guadalcanal identity.

In addition to this reversion to elements of “traditional culture”, IFM militants were heavily influenced by the numerous US Hollywood war videos shown in the cinemas around Honiara and at fundraisers.¹¹⁷ Militants wore any piece of military style uniform they could find, with Rambo style headbands especially popular.¹¹⁸

In 1999, IFM militants made a concerted effort to push Malaitan settlers out, first from the Weather Coast and later east and west of Honiara. Armed with an assortment of home made guns, air rifles, bows and arrows, sticks, bush knives and the odd high-powered rifle stolen from the Gold Ridge mine, and using old World War II ammunition, militants succeeded in pushing out approximately 20,000 settlers, mostly Malaitan, by June 1999.¹¹⁹ Carter records that at first, militants were almost surprised by their success. It appears that the new “status” their weapons helped them command and the sense of fear that they were able to instil in largely unorganised and defenceless settlers, enabled them to be extremely effective.¹²⁰ A foreign journalist writing in 1999 reported that, “The lush, beautiful, land west of Honiara is almost devoid of people.

¹¹⁵ Ibid; Tanis and Gray, "In Between: Personal Experiences in the 9-Year Long Conflict on Bougainville and Habuna Momoruqu (the Blood of My Island) Violence and the Guadalcanal Uprising in Solomon Islands."

¹¹⁶ Tanis and Gray, "In Between: Personal Experiences in the 9-Year Long Conflict on Bougainville and Habuna Momoruqu (the Blood of My Island) Violence and the Guadalcanal Uprising in Solomon Islands."

¹¹⁷ Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities," A: 2.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. Carter's account of the influences and appearance of IFM militants is a first hand account as he was based at Tabalia and Kohimarama respectively during 1999. Both communities are located on west Guadalcanal close to both Visale and Tamea and deep in IFM territory.

¹¹⁹ Kabutaulaka, *Beyond Ethnicity: The Political Economy of the Guadalcanal Crisis in Solomon Islands*, 3; Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities," A: 2; Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 110. Fraenkel notes that by November of 1999 35,309 people had reported themselves as being displaced. Yet he also quotes a figure of 24,000 being displaced by the same month. There is a question here whether the people reporting themselves as displaced may be different from the actual reported number. See Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 55, 61.

¹²⁰ Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities," A: 2.

Village after village is empty. The GRA have scored an impressive victory with barely a shot, rumour and paranoia did the rest".¹²¹

As the eviction campaign intensified, almost all settler groups found themselves displaced, including those with registered land titles and those with strong ties to indigenous communities through intermarriage. In many cases inter-island marriages simply broke up with Malaitan men fleeing into Honiara leaving their Guadalcanal wives and mixed ethnicity children behind.¹²² In other cases, Malaitan settlers with long-standing rights and indigenous connections were required to make "reconciliation" or "compensation" payments to militants, consisting of money and a pig, for the right to stay. However eventually this counted for very little as they, too, were chased away, harassed by a number of different IFM/GRA/GLF groups.¹²³

Although many settlers were able to leave unharmed, the evictions were not without incidents of violence, brutality and, in some cases, torture. An Amnesty International report of 2000 indicates graphic accounts of IFM violence towards Malaitan settlers.¹²⁴ By November 1999 an estimated 24,000 settlers had been displaced from Guadalcanal and at least 50 people had been killed, the majority of them Malaitan. Honiara quickly became overcrowded with refugees and many of the displaced returned to Malaita putting immense pressure on community resources, particularly in the already over populated north.

In early 1999, the government formed a task force to consider Guadalcanal Province demands, set up a Guadalcanal Peace Committee to tour dissident villages and

¹²¹ Cited in Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 54.

¹²² Ibid., 61. Although, as Brown notes, many did take their families back to Malaita. See Brown, "The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands by Jon Fraenkel," 265.

¹²³ Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 59. It seems that settlers were asked to pay compensation more than once to different IFM groups before they too were chased away. Thus militants themselves were able to take advantage of the chaos they created and to demand what they wanted.

¹²⁴ "Solomon Islands: A Forgotten Conflict," (Amnesty International, 2000), 19. See also Michael Field, "People Fear for Their Lives," *Pacific Islands Monthly*, July 1999, 26; Bennett, *Roots of Conflict in Solomon Islands Though Much Is Taken, Much Abides: Legacies of Tradition and Colonialism*, 11; Nori, "5th June 2000 in Perspective." In mid 1999 IFM militants chased four Malaitan youths into the theological college and headquarters of the Melanesian Brotherhood. One of the youths was struck across the back with the flat side of a bush knife, before Brothers were able to intervene and stop further violence. The four eventually escaped into the bush, with the intention of reaching Honiara, only two of them actually made it.

organised meetings involving customary chiefs and big-men from both Guadalcanal and Malaita.¹²⁵ Yet Prime Minister Ulufa'alu found himself in a difficult position. Carter notes that he and his government were unsure how to react. The expatriate police commissioner, Frank Short, advocated a tough approach, but Ulufa'alu, being Malaitan and the police force Malaitan dominated, feared the situation could explode.¹²⁶

Amnesty International noted that the police force did respond initially with restraint and hesitation, possibly because of their own internal ethnic divisions and lack of resources.¹²⁷ This is in contrast to Boge who claims that the police acted extremely harshly and contributed to the escalation of the situation.¹²⁸ However, when rumours spread of a militant attack on Honiara, the police conducted a number of "special operations" against militants, which entailed a number of shootouts. According to Kabutaulaka, after continuous shootouts between police and militants, thirteen IFM members had been killed by April 2000.¹²⁹

In May 1999 the government held a customary peace ceremony in Honiara involving village elders from both Guadalcanal and Malaita who, "garbed in traditional dress, exchanged gifts of shell money and pigs, 20 kg sacks of rice and cartons of tins of Solomon Blue tuna".¹³⁰ While in the past customary approaches to conflict resolution had been successful, Carter describes this attempt as, "a travesty of true customary practices" primarily because it had been orchestrated by the government acting as a middleman trying to pay the inflated compensation demands on behalf of the groups

¹²⁵ Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 51.

¹²⁶ Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities," A:2; Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 110-111.

¹²⁷ "Solomon Islands: A Forgotten Conflict," 9. Many of the police based in rural Guadalcanal simply fled or made personal arrangements with militant leaders. See Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 67.

¹²⁸ See Volker Boge, "Conflict Potential and Violent Conflicts in the South Pacific: Options for a Civil Peace Service-a Study for Service Overseas," Research Unit of Wars, Armament and Development University of Hamburg, <http://www.sozialwiss.uni-hamburg.de/publish/Ipw/Akuf/publ/ap1-01-engl.pdf>. Nori, on the other hand, criticized the police for their inaction, noting that although they had adequate firepower they decided not to act or were prevented from doing so. See Nori, "5th June 2000 in Perspective."

¹²⁹ Kabutaulaka, *Beyond Ethnicity: The Political Economy of the Guadalcanal Crisis in Solomon Islands*, 3.

¹³⁰ Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 65.

involved. Consequently, it only increased suspicion and prejudice rather than restored peace.¹³¹

The ceremony did not include those actually involved in the fighting and achieved very little. Only a few hours later renewed IFM attacks began on the Guadalcanal Plains. In June 1999, a four-month state of emergency was declared. This, among other things, gave the police greater powers of arrest and the use of greater force. A media ban restricting both local and foreign media was also enforced.¹³² In that same month, former Fiji coup leader and Prime Minister, Sitiveni Rabuka, together with a former Nigerian High Commissioner to London, Ade Adefuye, arrived as Commonwealth special envoys to try to broker a peace deal. After continued negotiations with IFM militants, leaders and government, a number of peace deals were negotiated over the next few months. These included the Honiara Peace Accord and the Panatina Agreement, but neither of them was successful in the long term because, among other things, the Honiara Peace Accord was signed without the IFM leaders present (although some did sign it afterwards) and none of them signed the Panatina Agreement.¹³³

4.2 The Malaita Eagle Force

By November 1999, displaced Malaitans were marching on parliament for compensation for lost property and Malaitan frustration and discontent was growing. There were numerous incidents of Guadalcanal people being assaulted in Honiara in retaliation for the uprising and, from June 1999 onwards, Malaitan vigilantes were setting up roadblocks on Honiara's outskirts.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities," A: 2.

¹³² Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 67; Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 111; Michael Field, "Solomons Governor General Proclaims State of Emergency," Pacific Islands Development Program/East-West Center for Pacific Islands Studies/University of Hawai'i at Manoa, <http://archives.pireport.org/archive/1999/june/06-17-01.htm>; Michael Field, "Ethnic Tension Worsens in the Solomons," *Pacific Islands Monthly*, July 1999, 24-25; George Atkins, "Solomon Islands under Emergency Powers as Guadalcanal Spills toward Civil War," Pacific Islands Development Program/East-West Center for Pacific Islands Studies/University of Hawai'i at Manoa, <http://archives.pireport.org/archive/1999/june/06-17-01.htm>.

¹³³ Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 71; Kabutaulaka, *Beyond Ethnicity: The Political Economy of the Guadalcanal Crisis in Solomon Islands*, 17.

¹³⁴ Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 112.

In January 2000, a group of masked men raided the police armoury at Auki, the capital of Malaita Province and stole at least thirty-four high-powered rifles and two hundred rounds of ammunition.¹³⁵ This incident had come after rumours of guns missing from the main armoury in Honiara and more frequent and organised Malaitan vigilante raids into Guadalcanal.¹³⁶

Nori claimed the raid was a reaction and retaliation for:

1. the eviction of Malaitans from Guadalcanal;
2. the failure of the IFM to lay down their arms;
3. illegal Guadalcanal occupation of property abandoned by fleeing Malaitans;
4. the National Government's failure to pay compensation for loss of life and property.¹³⁷

This group, backed by Malaitan elements in the police force and prominent Malaitan businessmen, quickly grew into a militant group calling itself the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF). According to Moore, its members were largely drawn from the northern regions of Malaita and were a combination of Malaitans angry at the eviction of settlers, disaffected youths looking for adventure, opportunistic criminals and Malaitan nationalists.¹³⁸ They established roadblocks in Honiara under the pretext of defending Malaitans and began armed raids against the IFM on Honiara's outskirts.¹³⁹

In February 2000 the Ulufa'alu government declared the IFM and MEF illegal organizations but had no power to deal with them. The IFM now controlled rural Guadalcanal and the MEF Honiara. Another peace conference planned and held at Buala, Isabel Province, was unsuccessful because, again, none of the militant groups attended in protest at the declaration of illegality placed on them. The Malaita Province

¹³⁵ *United Nations Common Country Assessment Solomon Islands*, 54; Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 82.

¹³⁶ Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 82.

¹³⁷ Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 124-125; Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 82; Nori, "5th June 2000 in Perspective."

¹³⁸ Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 125-126.

¹³⁹ Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities," A: 3.

delegation also stayed away after threats from the MEF. Not surprisingly, the conference achieved very little as armed skirmishes between IFM and MEF continued.

4.3 The Coup - 5th June 2000

On 5th June 2000, MEF militants in a “joint operation” with members of the police force, seized control of the police armoury, police naval boats and all key installations in Honiara. Prime Minister Ulufa’alu was placed under house arrest and ordered to resign. Under immense pressure, Ulufa’alu did resign a few days later and parliament was reconvened to “elect” a successor. Opposition leader Manasseh Sogavare, from Choiseul, was chosen and elected Prime Minister, but it was common knowledge that Ulufa’alu had resigned under the barrel of a gun and that the parliament sat under considerable duress and MEF interference.¹⁴⁰

As a result of the “coup,” fighting intensified between IFM and MEF militants who now faced each other in bunkers across a no-man’s land on both sides of Honiara.¹⁴¹ Within the capital the “joint operation” of both militants and members of the police force were now “in charge” of law and order and were treated almost as “the military arm of the government”.¹⁴² Brown argues that although some members of the MEF were conscientious and made positive contributions to security in Honiara, opportunistic criminals both inside and outside the organization were able to take advantage and intimidate, steal and threaten as they liked.¹⁴³ Businesses were robbed and harassed for

¹⁴⁰ Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 87. MEF interference in the voting process was significant. For example MEF militants prevented a plane departing to the Western Province to pick up six parliamentarians and, as a result, affected who was eventually elected as the new Prime Minister. Boge argues that the group of parliamentarians had refused to come to Honiara and work under pressure from an illegal group. The MEF had also threatened to shoot the plane down if they attempted to land at the airport. All of them were Ulufa’alu supporters. See Boge, "Conflict Potential and Violent Conflicts in the South Pacific: Options for a Civil Peace Service-a Study for Service Overseas."; Kabutaulaka, *A Weak State and the Solomon Islands Peace Process*, 12; Dinnen, "Political Chronicles: Winners and Losers: Politics and Disorder in the Solomon Islands 2000-2002," 288; John Roughan, "Solomons Has a New Prime Minister," <http://rspas.anu.edu.au/melanesia/solomonarticles.htm>.

¹⁴¹ Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities," A: 3.

¹⁴² Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 141.

¹⁴³ Terry Brown, "Private View: Suggestions for the Present Crisis," *Solomon Star* 2000. Moore on the other hand describes the MEF degenerating into a factional group of criminal warlords with their own personal territories. See Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 141. While there were some criminal gangs operating under the pretext of being MEF, Moore’s interpretation may well be an exaggeration. The gangs were led not so much by

money: vehicle theft and house break-ins were common as was looting and destruction of government property.¹⁴⁴

As fighting intensified around Honiara, so did accounts of atrocities and human rights abuses on both sides, including torture and beheading of captured prisoners.¹⁴⁵ Being “arrested” by the MEF almost certainly meant, at the very least, a beating, and captured IFM militants were interrogated and often beaten to death.¹⁴⁶ A few days after the coup, the police patrol boat *Lata* was used by MEF militants to shell IFM positions east of Honiara, provoking “concern” from the Australian government who had donated the vessel.¹⁴⁷ By far the biggest outcry came however, when, on 10th July, three masked gunmen entered the National Hospital and shot dead three IFM patients in their beds.¹⁴⁸ The MEF denied responsibility although an Amnesty International report claimed that the organization was “well aware of the identity of the perpetrators”.¹⁴⁹

The coup was widely condemned by the international community, economic aid was withdrawn and Australian and New Zealand nationals, among others, were advised to leave resulting in a mass exodus of expatriates.¹⁵⁰ According to a United Nations report by the end of 2000, more than 100 people had reportedly been killed, although the Head Brother of the Melanesian Brotherhood claimed the figure was closer to 1000.

4.4 Ceasefire - Townsville Peace Agreement

The actual fighting between IFM and MEF militants reached a climax in the days after the coup but proved to be relatively short-lived and, by August 2000, a cease-fire

“criminal warlords” but simple opportunists taking advantage of the situation. They also appeared to be largely disorganized, appearing anywhere across Honiara rather than organized into “personal territories”.

¹⁴⁴ Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 139.

¹⁴⁵ “Solomon Islands: A Forgotten Conflict,” 1-35; Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 141.

¹⁴⁶ Brown, “Private View: Suggestions for the Present Crisis,” 1; John Roughan, “Murder-Execution Shatters the Establishment,” <http://rspas.anu.edu.au/melanesia/solomonsarticles.htm>; Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 140-141.

¹⁴⁷ Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 90-91.

¹⁴⁸ This incident was widely reported in the international media. See also John Roughan, “Murder-Execution Shatters the Establishment.”

¹⁴⁹ “Solomon Islands: A Forgotten Conflict,” 15.

¹⁵⁰ It is also worth noting that not all expatriates left. According to MacDonald-Milne, the British High Commissioner disagreed with his colleagues about the need to evacuate and stayed. See Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 325.

agreement had been signed by militant leaders aboard the Australian warship *HMAS Tobruk*. Under the terms of the agreement IFM and MEF militants were expected to lay down their arms and refrain from “hostile offensive, insulting or provocative behaviour”. They were also expected to stay within their specific areas of influence, Honiara for MEF and rural Guadalcanal for IFM. The responsibility for law and order in Honiara was supposed to pass to the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force and a Ceasefire Monitoring Council was established to monitor the terms of the agreement, which was to last for 90 days.¹⁵¹

Despite the ceasefire being breached on a number of occasions, it did pave the way for further peace negotiations. During October, peace talks were held between militant leaders and members of Provincial and National Governments in Townsville, Australia, and a peace agreement was signed on 5th October. When the various leaders returned home, direct hostilities ceased, roadblocks and bunkers were dismantled and rowdy peace celebrations began in Honiara with both sets of former militants arm in arm and engaging in betel-nut chewing and boisterous drinking parties.¹⁵² “Peace” had returned, but there were still significant problems, principally among them being the refusal of Harold Keke, a senior IFM/GRA commander, to attend or sign the peace deal. Keke refused to sign because, he claimed, the government had failed in its promise to grant the people of Guadalcanal state government.¹⁵³

Under the terms of the agreement, militants were to be given a blanket amnesty for crimes committed during the conflict and in return, they would surrender all weapons and ammunition to an International Peace Monitoring Team (IPMT).

The disarmament process, however, was largely ineffective. The IPMT members who arrived to oversee the process were unarmed and were there purely to monitor and observe, not to enforce any disarmament.¹⁵⁴ Hegarty, the former head of the IPMT, noted that the organization was clearly under-mandated and had no enforcement mandate to pursue disarmament, having to rely instead on persuasion and the goodwill

¹⁵¹ Dinnen, "Political Chronicles: Winners and Losers: Politics and Disorder in the Solomon Islands 2000-2002," 289.

¹⁵² Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 100.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁵⁴ Dinnen, "Guns, Money and Politics: Disorder in the Solomon Islands," 33.

of communities.¹⁵⁵ Consequently, although approximately 800 guns were handed in, most of them were homemade, while approximately 500 high-powered weapons remained at large.

Such weapons had now become not only the means of self-defence but also a bargaining chip in negotiations, inducements for compensation payments and for influencing political and economic decisions.¹⁵⁶ With the absence of a working police force, those with guns could act with impunity and demand what they wished from whomsoever they liked. The Sogavare Government being in no position to resist the demands of ex-militants, embarked upon a “cheque book” approach to government and survived by “giving away money to anyone who threatened its stability”.¹⁵⁷

In December 2001, elections were held and a new government elected. Despite over half the serving MPs losing their seats, this largely meant a reshuffling of members who had served under Sogavare. The new Prime Minister was Sir Allan Kemakeza, the former Peace and Reconciliation Minister under Sogavare, and Deputy Prime Minister Snyder Rini, the former Finance Minister. The new Government also included Alex Bartlett, a former supreme commander of the MEF, as Foreign Minister. From 2001-2003, Solomon Islands remained in a state of near economic collapse and lawlessness continued unabated in parts of Guadalcanal and Malaita. This situation effectively led to Kemakeza requesting outside assistance, Australia declaring the country a “failed state” and the arrival of the Regional Assistance Mission in July 2003.

5. The Role of the Religious Communities in Peacemaking during the Conflict

Before any specific examination of the Brotherhood’s role as peacemakers, it is important to note that they were not the only group working for peace. For example

¹⁵⁵ David Hegarty, "Peace Interventions in the South Pacific: Lessons from Bougainville and Solomon Islands" (paper presented at the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies Conference Island State Security 2003: "Oceania at the Crossroads", Canberra, 15th-17th October 2003), 8. Interestingly however, in a joint statement from the Australian and New Zealand Ministers of Foreign Affairs, the IPMT were praised for a job well done, the mission was portrayed as a success. See Alexander Downer and Phil Goff, "Praise for International Peace Team in Solomon Islands," (2002), http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2002/fa094_02.html.

¹⁵⁶ Dinnen, "Guns, Money and Politics: Disorder in the Solomon Islands," 33-34.

¹⁵⁷ Wale, "The Solomon Islands Peace Process-Made in Townsville, Made for Unsustainability."; Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 171.

within the Civil Society, groups such as the National Council of Women and Women for Peace, made up of women of all ages and denominations, were actively involved in formal peace negotiations. They also regularly organised meetings with militants on the roadblocks and bunkers to encourage them to lay down their arms, as well as prayer meetings, the exchange of essential goods across the roadblocks, visits to the displaced and help with the rehabilitation of ex-militants. An important part of their work was the “pivotal” role they played as mothers able to appeal directly to their own fathers, brothers, nephews and uncles to lay down their arms.¹⁵⁸

The work of the Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA), an ecumenical body comprising the five main Christian denominations in the islands, (the Church of Melanesia, the Catholic Church, United Church of Solomon Islands, South Sea Evangelical Church and the Seventh Day Adventists), also took a leading role in encouraging moves towards peace. For example, SICA sent an SDA pastor to lead its negotiating team in peace talks in June 2000, since Andrew Nori spokesman of the MEF and Henry Tobani spokesman of the IFM were members of the SDA Church. SICA also sponsored a peace conference in late August of that same year.¹⁵⁹ The co-operation between Christian denominations and the common desire for peace also meant various inter-denominational initiatives being taken by the Churches. For example the Catholic Sisters of Mary and the Anglican Sisters of Melanesia worked together in the Women for Peace movement, and the Anglican Diocese of Malaita worked with Catholic, SSEC, SDA and other smaller churches in North Malaita to set up parish peace committees which worked with returning families, ex-militants and victims of violence and theft.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ See for example Ruth Liloqula and Alice A Pollard, "Understanding Conflict in Solomon Islands as a Practical Means to Peacemaking Men, Women and the Church the Women for Peace Analysis and Approach."; "Women Speak out in Solomon Islands," *Freedom Letter Amnesty International*, September-October 2004; Ethel Sigimanu, "Women in Conflict Situations and the Peace Process in SI," *Solomon Star*, <http://solomonstarnews.com/drupal-4.4.1/?q=node/view/1498>; Sean Dorney, "Women of Solomon Islands Appeal to Gunmen for Peace," Australian Broadcasting Corporation, <http://www.abc.net.au/pm/s141298.htm>; John Roughan, "Women's Fire Power," <http://rspas.anu.edu.au/melanesia/solomonarticles.htm>; Mareta Tahu, "Women in Peace-Making in Solomon Islands," Pacific Region of the World Association for Christian Communication, <http://www.pacificwacc.org/solomon.htm>; Alice Pollard, "Resolving Conflict in Solomon Islands: The Women for Peace Approach," http://www.womenwarpeace.org/csw/solomons_pollard.pdf.

¹⁵⁹ Christine Weir, "The Churches in Solomon Islands and Fiji: Responses to the Crises of 2000," *Development Bulletin*, no. 53 (2000): 49.

¹⁶⁰ Liloqula and Pollard, *Understanding Conflict in Solomon Islands: A Practical Means to Peacemaking*, 10; Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 153.

The four Religious Communities of the Church of Melanesia were also heavily involved in peacemaking and reconciliation. The Community of the Sisters of Melanesia, a community of women organised along the same lines as the Melanesian Brotherhood and who, like the Brothers, take temporary vows, were formed in 1980. They have centres on both Malaita and Guadalcanal but their main headquarters is located at Veranaaso on West Guadalcanal deep in IFM territory.¹⁶¹ Alongside Veranaaso is Hautabu the headquarters of the Society of St Francis who have been active in the islands since the 1960's particularly in urban mission in Honiara and in other centres such as Gizo in the Western Province and Kira Kira in Makira.¹⁶² To the east of Honiara on the Guadalcanal Plains is Tetete ni Kolivuti, the headquarters of the Community of the Sisters of the Church. Formed in 1870, the Sisters take vows of poverty chastity and obedience and work across the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia, beginning work in Solomon Islands in 1970. Sisters work among women and children in Honiara, (particularly victims of domestic violence), and have centres on Malaita, Santa Cruz and Makira.¹⁶³ These three religious communities, along with the Melanesian Brotherhood, found that, at the onset of conflict they were all in a somewhat unique position because all of them had their headquarters in rural Guadalcanal in areas controlled by the IFM, and households, or at least a significant presence, in MEF-controlled Honiara. The communities found themselves divided by roadblocks and bunkers and, geographically at least, they were in the middle of a war zone.¹⁶⁴

The first response of the Religious Communities was a humanitarian one. As Malaitan settlers were pushed off the land, Tabalia (the headquarters of the Melanesian Brotherhood) in the west and Tetete ni Kolivuti (the headquarters of the Sisters of the

¹⁶¹ Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 193-194; *Anglican Religious Communities Year Book 2002-2003: Expanded International Edition*, 92-93.

¹⁶² Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*; *Anglican Religious Communities Year Book 2002-2003: Expanded International Edition*, 145-146.

¹⁶³ *Anglican Religious Communities Year Book 2002-2003: Expanded International Edition*, 86-89; Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 193.

¹⁶⁴ Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 153; Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities," A: 4; Richard A Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands, with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities " (paper presented at the Melanesian Contextual Theology Conference, Bishop Patteson Theological College, Kohimarama, Solomon Islands, 19-26th August 2004), B: 1; Terry Brown, "The Role of Religious Communities in Peacemaking: The Solomon Islands", Project Canterbury 2007, http://anglicanhistory.org/academic/brown_religious2003.pdf, 1.

Church) in the east became houses of refuge for the displaced.¹⁶⁵ The same thing happened with Guadalcanal people trapped in MEF controlled Honiara who found refuge in the various religious community households and at the Brotherhood's Malaita headquarters at Airahu, for Guadalcanal people living on Malaita.¹⁶⁶

All of these areas became safe places of refuge, because, according to Carter, militants respected the sacredness of these places and would not invade or defile them.¹⁶⁷ The Religious Communities were left alone and largely respected and, as Carter observes, "the only time a group of IFM militants chased a group of Malaitans into Tabalia the IFM commander very quickly controlled his men and apologised profusely to the Head Brother for failing to respect the Headquarters".¹⁶⁸ This respect also extended to freedom of movement. Only church trucks, including the religious communities, church schools and the theological college were allowed through the roadblocks erected to prevent movement of people between the IFM and MEF controlled areas. However, when school and college trucks were harassed or prevented from passing, which happened occasionally, the Religious Communities were given free passage. This was highly significant because the Religious Communities were able to ferry displaced Malaitans safely to Honiara, including the seriously injured and dead, and were able to feed those staying with them on Guadalcanal.¹⁶⁹ In this way, the communities were able to limit the level of bloodshed which could have occurred had they not been there.

Alongside the respect that militants had for the Religious Communities, was an acknowledgement that both Brothers and Sisters had an allegiance to God and to all Melanesians, which cut across ethnicity. As Carter observes, at a time when schools, colleges, villages and families were divided across ethnic lines and opposing island

¹⁶⁵ Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities," A: 4; Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands, with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities ", B: 1-2.

¹⁶⁶ Brown, "The Role of Religious Communities in Peacemaking: The Solomon Islands," 2.

¹⁶⁷ Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities," A: 4; Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands, with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities", B: 2.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands, with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities", B: 2; Brown, "The Role of Religious Communities in Peacemaking: The Solomon Islands," 1-2; Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 324.

groups were treated with suspicion and fear, the Religious Communities were able to maintain their unity.¹⁷⁰ They were the only group whom the militants themselves did not seem to discriminate against or judge according to island or tribe and Malaitan Brothers and Sisters were able to move freely among IFM militants”.¹⁷¹

The Religious Communities became symbolic places where both Malaitans and Guadalcanal people continued to live and work together in the midst of violence perpetrated around them. This symbolism was not lost on the Melanesian Brotherhood who, at their Great Conference in October 1999, elected a Head Brother from Malaita and an Assistant Head Brother from Guadalcanal. This, in itself, was symbolic of what the Brotherhood stood for.

As the conflict developed, IFM militants and Guadalcanal people also needed help and refuge when their own homes and villages came under attack from the MEF.¹⁷² Requests began to pour in from both sides for help in searching for relatives, reuniting divided families, picking up possessions left behind, protecting those threatened and transporting them to safety.¹⁷³

6. *The Melanesian Brotherhood as Peacemakers*

Brothers, disturbed by the violence around them, felt the need to reach out beyond Tabalia with their own brand of community and ethnic solidarity to the conflict zones and militants themselves. As Head Brother Harry Gereniu himself confirms:

We had our brothers and novices from both Guadalcanal and Malaita all staying, playing, working, eating and sleeping together. We still enjoyed our peace, maintained our trust and dedication in serving together as brothers. The most disturbing

¹⁷⁰ Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities," A: 4.

¹⁷¹ Ibid; Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands, with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities ", B: 1. The same was true of Malaitan students studying at the theological college. They were allowed to stay, unharmed because, according to the IFM militants, they would be returning to their own island and own people and not settling on Guadalcanal permanently, plus the fact that they were working for the Church which gave them a special status, again highlighting the influence that the Church has, even over militants.

¹⁷² Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities," A: 4.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

and uncomfortable challenge was that here we were enjoying this peace together, while just a few yards away there was our very own people brutally killing each other. Some of our very own relatives were killed. The question was, “*Are we going to remain just as spectators, while our very own people, Solomon Islanders, Melanesians and Christians are continuing to kill each other?*” This question was continuously haunting me personally as a member and leader of a Christian religious order. That was, because living at Tabalia was like living on an oasis in the desert on war torn Guadalcanal at that period.¹⁷⁴

By May 2000, the Brothers had decided to be much more directly involved in peacemaking efforts. A team of Brothers was chosen and commissioned to work directly for peace between both the IFM and MEF. Led and encouraged by their own specially commissioned chaplain, Fr Jack Aitorea, Brothers were sent to the militant groups with a number of clearly defined objectives. These were as follows:

1. Explanation of the intended involvement of the Melanesian Brotherhood in trying to bring a common understanding between the two factions.
2. Clearly stating the Brotherhood’s non-political and independent approach and independent views of the grave dangers of the current situation then.
3. Just being with them, the “ministry of presence”.
4. Praying and leading Bible studies with them.
5. Talking with them and even getting to know some of them personally.
6. Finding out about their basic plans and aims and giving them suggested better alternatives.
7. Encouraging them to see and acknowledge the negative impacts of the situation on themselves and their fellow human beings.
8. Maintaining impartiality at all times to both parties.
9. Keeping firsthand information in secret from the public and the media.
10. Having the idea of having to trust the warring parties at times to help maintain their trust in us.
11. Approaching their situation in a gentle unarmed manner, except with words as our only weapon and shield.

¹⁷⁴ Harry Gereniu, "Experiences of the Ethnic Tension" (paper presented at the The Melanesian Contextual Theology Conference, Bishop Patteson Theological College, Kohimarama, Solomon Islands, 19th-26th August 2004).

12. Always explain either quickly or slowly when things go wrong between them and us, depending on the manner of seriousness of the issue.
13. Always remaining positive with self-confidence when things went out of hand between the two parties.
14. Reiterate to them our cultural, moral and Christians [sic] values.
15. Honestly professing the fundamental aim of trying to bring a truce and finally a peaceful resolution.¹⁷⁵

With these objectives in mind, Brothers moved back and forth between the militant groups on the front line and literally camped in the no-man's land between them. For the next four months, Brothers talked to, prayed with and gave pastoral care to both sides, calming them and encouraging them to cease hostilities. They also "forbade in the name of God, either side to advance beyond their boundaries".¹⁷⁶ Brothers also visited the militant camps where prisoners were being held and tortured and were successful in rescuing some of them.¹⁷⁷

In the course of their work, Brothers found themselves in extremely dangerous situations, very often in the middle of shootouts between both sides. Although striving to be impartial, Brothers were sometimes accused of favouring one side or the other. For example, Moore comments that although going into the fighting zone under unbiased auspices there was evidence that a few Brothers were sympathetic to the MEF, although he does not state what that evidence is.¹⁷⁸ An informant that I spoke to indicated the opposite, that some Brothers had IFM sympathies.¹⁷⁹ Carter on the other hand claims that such accusations of partiality were made by both hard-line militants and hardened politicians who saw Brothers as "meddling and obstructive".¹⁸⁰ Brothers strove to stay neutral, but in some cases, especially for some of the Malaitan and

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities," A: 5; Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands, with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities ", B: 3.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 92.

¹⁷⁸ Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 6.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with "G", August 2005, Auckland, New Zealand.

¹⁸⁰ Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities," A: 5; Brown, "The Role of Religious Communities in Peacemaking: The Solomon Islands," 5.

Guadalcanal Brothers who had lost relatives in the fighting or who were related to militants, it was naturally difficult not to feel some sympathy or identification with that cause. Those Brothers who did over-identify with their own island's militant group were released from the Order.¹⁸¹

Often Brothers were asked for favours or information about the other side and either giving or not giving information could spark accusations of favouritism from either side.¹⁸² Two other important issues came out of the Brothers' mission, which were:

First, although frequently in situations of great danger, no Brother was seriously injured or killed during the fighting. Brothers in particular were already respected and feared for the mana associated with them and, as a result of no harm coming to them, stories began to circulate that they were under God's special protection. People's reverence, awe and fear of Brothers increased as stories were told of how bullets bent around them, of guns refusing to fire when pointed at them and one particular story of how when one Brother was fired upon, the bullet was embedded in his prayerbook.¹⁸³ Stories of their spiritual power also began to circulate, including how one militant died after being paralysed with fear after breaking a Brother's walking stick. Another story told of how, when involved in the later disarmament process, guns not given up to the Brothers would turn into snakes.¹⁸⁴ During my field work in April-May 2005 two ex-Brothers told me of how, during a shootout at Alligator Creek to the east of Honiara, their truck, caught in the middle, was untouched and undamaged, their interpretation being that it was protected by a Brother's walking stick standing upright in the back.¹⁸⁵ This was regarded as a sign of God's power protecting the Brotherhood and those items associated with them.

Secondly, another significant factor which became much more apparent later was that many Brothers were witness to significant atrocities including death, torture and violence, some even having to dig up bodies of the dead to identify and return them to

¹⁸¹ Brown, "The Role of Religious Communities in Peacemaking: The Solomon Islands," 5.

¹⁸² This was the case with the drivers of the theological college's truck who were regularly asked for information and/or supplies from Honiara, and were forced to walk a tightrope between the two groups in the attempt not to antagonize either side.

¹⁸³ Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities," A: 6.

¹⁸⁴ Interview with "H", May 2005, Honiara, Solomon Islands.

¹⁸⁵ Interview with "I", May 2005, Honiara, Solomon Islands.

their families.¹⁸⁶ Many ended up being traumatized and psychologically affected by the experience and would eventually leave the Brotherhood altogether, while others struggled on trying to make sense of what they had witnessed. With no trauma counsellors or facilities available or, as Brown claims, no realization that they actually needed them, difficulties would eventually begin to emerge.¹⁸⁷

After the Townsville Peace Agreement was signed in October 2000, the Brothers helped to organize the peace and reconciliation celebrations in Honiara. However, although direct hostilities were now over, the police force was still badly compromised, lawlessness was a problem and many of the weapons were still being held by ex-militants. Consequently, members of the Brotherhood joined with the secular Peace Monitoring Council, an organization designed to oversee the TPA, to work on both Guadalcanal and Malaita in an effort to recover weapons and work with communities still coming to terms with the conflict. This, however, only added to the strain that Brothers were under. From 1999 onwards, and particularly post-TPA, increasing numbers of Brothers were providing security for individual homes and companies around Honiara, in Auki, (the Provincial Capital of Malaita), as well as on the ships operating between the two and as bodyguards for senior leaders of the country, including the Governor-General.¹⁸⁸ Carter argues that, it is easy with hindsight to say that Brothers became too involved becoming “policemen” and “security guards”, but with no proper functioning police force, there was no one else to turn to.¹⁸⁹ The respect and fear that Brothers generated was enough to keep would-be thieves and criminal

¹⁸⁶ Gereniu, "Experiences of the Ethnic Tension"; Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities," A: 5; Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands, with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities", B: 3. The other religious communities were also involved in this work.

¹⁸⁷ Brown, "The Role of Religious Communities in Peacemaking: The Solomon Islands," 4. It was only much later that Brothers did receive trauma counselling. In April 2004, Anglicord held a trauma-counselling workshop for the religious communities led by Peter Hosking, a Jesuit Priest and clinical psychologist. See Stephen Crittenden, "The Religion Report: 21 July 2004 Melanesian Brotherhood Murders," Australian Broadcasting Corporation, <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/8.30/re/rpt/stories/s1156164.htm>; "Anglicord Heals the Traumatized," *Melanesian Messenger*, May 2004.

¹⁸⁸ Brown, "The Role of Religious Communities in Peacemaking: The Solomon Islands," 2; Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 153; Weir, "Christianity in the Solomon Islands-the Response in the Current Crisis."; Bill Bowder, "Melanesian Brothers Are Murdered by Rebels," *Church Times*, 15th August 2003.

¹⁸⁹ Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands, with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities", B: 3.

elements away, but the line between being a Religious Community and involvement in secular work was becoming blurred.

As Brothers became more involved in the peace process, their households around the islands began to empty as Brothers were sent to Guadalcanal or Malaita. When working with the PMC Brothers were often separated from their Communities and the Religious Life and difficulties began to emerge. In some cases Brothers were paid for their work against the rules of the Community and were plied with alcohol, fancy additions to their uniforms and other gifts by PMC staff and the general public.¹⁹⁰ Other Brothers found it difficult to return to the modest households around the islands after being exposed to the “excitement” of dangerous ministry on the front line. Some Brothers were not always obedient to their postings, preferring the excitement of urban areas instead.¹⁹¹ Another serious problem was the growing feeling that the government, realizing the enormous influence of the Brotherhood, was co-opting them for their own advantage.¹⁹² Seeing the detrimental effect this was having, the Archbishop and Head Brother decided to withdraw all Brothers from the PMC after only a few months.

In 2002, the Brotherhood was asked again by both government and the police to join the PMC and the IPMT to help in the process of disarmament and collection of illegally held weapons. They agreed, but having learnt from the previous experience, insisted on remaining independent from both groups to conduct their own disarmament programme, while maintaining their own community and spiritual life.¹⁹³

The results were dramatic. First, the Brothers addressed the police force asking for the weapons that many officers still held illegally, to be returned. There was discussion, initially some resistance to the idea, but eventually the officers agreed. A reconciliation service was held where opposing factions in the force publicly apologised to each other. A few days later, the weapons were returned and locked in the police armoury.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁰ Brown, "The Role of Religious Communities in Peacemaking: The Solomon Islands," 4; Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities," A: 6.

¹⁹¹ Ibid

¹⁹² Ibid

¹⁹³ Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities," A: 7; Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 329.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid

As Carter observes, over the next five months many guns and much ammunition were given up to the Brothers, taken out to sea and thrown overboard. By November 2002, the disarmament mission ended with Brothers believing that they had done all they could. Although many weapons were still at large, a considerable number had been given up and critical to this was the spiritual significance of giving up weapons to Brothers. For Carter, the giving up of weapons by ex-militants was not so much to receive a certificate of amnesty heavily publicised in the PMC and IPMT campaigns, but because it brought a sense of closure, reconciliation and healing from the trauma of conflict.¹⁹⁵ So as Hosking notes:

The Melanesian Brotherhood became involved in the collection of weapons. Many people chose to surrender to the Brothers, because it was not just relinquishing weapons, but it was a real rite of purification, and in many cases when the weapons were collected, they had a liturgy to express that forgiveness, in a sense a reconciliation and a letting go of all that violence.¹⁹⁶

While the disarmament mission appeared successful there were also considerable difficulties. Some accused or warned the Brotherhood of the dangers of being too closely identified with government and becoming embroiled in political agendas. For example, Carter records how, when meeting with Leslie Kwaiga, an ex-senior leader of the MEF, Kwaiga warned of how the Brothers were being manipulated by the government. He claimed that the government was using the Brotherhood because they could hide behind the Brothers' reputation of integrity and respectability. He warned that Brothers were innocent in all of this but, by being unwittingly used, they will lose the trust and respect of the people.¹⁹⁷ Carter records afterwards how he and Brother Jude felt as if they had, "been given an insight into a conspiracy beyond our depth".¹⁹⁸ Certainly Carter was worried that this was a real danger, noting later that, "I fear that the more we are being called upon by police and government the more we are in danger of becoming entangled".¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ Ibid

¹⁹⁶ Crittenden, "The Religion Report: 21 July 2004 Melanesian Brotherhood Murders."

¹⁹⁷ Carter, *In Search of the Lost: The Death and Life of Seven Peacemakers of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 82.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 85.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 110.

There also seemed to be problems within the disarmament group members who, again, according to Carter, were now living a life of adrenalin, rushing from one disarmament mission to another. Consequently, other members of the Brotherhood saw them, “rushing about in the four-wheel drive like action men, and are beginning to resent them”.²⁰⁰ The “fast-living” and adrenalin rush of disarmament mission was pulling Brothers in all directions, severely affecting their life as a Religious Community and creating tensions within it.

The role of the Brotherhood throughout the conflict was critical; their work in keeping the warring sides apart and encouraging them to seek a peaceful resolution almost certainly prevented mass blood-shed, so much so that in Brown’s view, without the contribution of all the Religious Communities, “the Solomons might have ended up as yet another genocide”...²⁰¹ Yet, all of this took a considerable toll on the Community, with Brothers having to come to terms with what they had experienced, their new found status as weapon-collectors and the dangers of being unwittingly embroiled in the political agendas of others.

7. *Harold Keke, The Weather Coast and the Murder of Seven Brothers*

While the work of the Brothers as peacemakers was significant, their involvement in such work would eventually lead to tragedy. In 2003 followers of Guadalcanal militant Harold Keke horrifically murdered seven Brothers and this atrocity outraged not only Solomon Islanders but also the international community as the story was covered in a number of major newspapers and news channels. The Brotherhood was shaken to its foundations as Brothers and Christians of all denominations struggled to find an answer as to why this had happened. For the first time in the Brotherhood’s history Brothers had been murdered and, as more details emerged, tortured in cold blood.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 97.

²⁰¹ Brown, "The Role of Religious Communities in Peacemaking: The Solomon Islands," 5. This was also the view of two of my informants. Interview with “A”, May 2005, Tabalia, Solomon Islands. And Interview with “J”, May 2005, Kohimarama, Solomon Islands. See also Kabutaulaka, *A Weak State and the Solomon Islands Peace Process*, 23.

7.1 Harold Keke

Harold Keke was probably the most hard-line of militant leaders on Guadalcanal and had refused to sign the TPA because he believed that the government was failing to deliver on the promise to grant Guadalcanal state government.²⁰² Keke and his followers called themselves the Guadalcanal Liberation Front, distinct from the IFM from whom they had effectively now broken away, and they controlled a large part of the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal, notoriously difficult to reach due to rough seas and the sheer cliff faces that litter the coast line.²⁰³ There are also no roads to that part of the island, only dense bush and jungle. Post-TPA governments and other organizations, including the Brotherhood, had attempted to negotiate with Keke, but all attempts had failed.

In the elections of 2001, Keke and his followers backed Fr Augustine Geve, a Catholic priest, to be Member of Parliament for South Guadalcanal. He subsequently won and became Minister of Youth, Women and Sports in Kemakeza's government.²⁰⁴ Yet in June 2002 Keke murdered him for allegedly, "misusing funds meant for the constituency and for being dishonest with the people".²⁰⁵ This was one of a number of atrocities committed, or at least ordered, by Keke. Others included the capture of a Solomon Airlines light aircraft and its pilot in September 2000, (the pilot was eventually released after a ransom was paid), and being implicated in the attempted assassination of Guadalcanal Premier Alebua in June 2001.²⁰⁶

Things became even more complex when, in June 2002, ten men from East Kwaio on Malaita, together with a Bougainvillean guide, travelled by boat to the Weather Coast to attempt to assassinate Keke. They failed, with only the guide surviving. Accusations flew about as to who organised and financed the operation, which only added to Keke's own increasing sense of paranoia. Meanwhile Keke continued to control the area and effectively the villages therein, but after the murder of Geve, "the image of Keke as a

²⁰² Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 98.

²⁰³ Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 151.

²⁰⁴ Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 142.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 143.

²⁰⁶ Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 151; Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 127.

political saviour and liberation fighter no longer held its former credibility”.²⁰⁷ People lived in fear of him and his followers, many of whom were young boys. In addition, his unpredictability began to grow. Although communication to that part of the island was difficult, there were times when he seemed willing to negotiate peace and communicated this.²⁰⁸ Other times he seemed to be advocating the opposite. There were also times when he indicated his belief that his cause was justified and that he was following God’s will. As his paranoia and instability grew, Keke became, Fraenkel claims, “an obsessive evangelist, preaching hell-fire and fury, and defence of the motherland”.²⁰⁹ He also began to impose bizarre rules on the villages in his area, including prohibitions on gardening, making fires and working on both Mondays and Fridays: instead the people were ordered to pray.²¹⁰

The Solomon Islands Police force did establish a presence on the Weather Coast but they were few in number and did not have the resources to contain Keke or his followers. Many of those police officers were former members of the MEF/Joint Operation responsible for the coup in the capital, meaning they were already compromised, thereby making it difficult for local people to trust them. In 2003, the situation grew steadily worse, with atrocities being reported on both sides.²¹¹ The police were also joined by “special constables” many of whom were former IFM militants under the command of ex-militant Andrew Te’e, now hunting their former allies.²¹² Keke had by now also begun to burn villages and take hostages, especially those supporting the police presence.

²⁰⁷ Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 143.

²⁰⁸ Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 192. Prior to the assassination attempt Keke had been negotiating with Member of Parliament Yukio Sato and after the incident had invited Andrew Nori to take part in negotiations.

²⁰⁹ Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 144.

²¹⁰ Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*, 192. Even when Keke finally surrendered, he claimed that it was the will of God, as reported in the *Solomon Star*. See Rick Rubosa, "The Day Keke Surrendered," *Solomon Star*, 22nd August 2003.

²¹¹ See "Amnesty International Solomon Islands: Covering Events from January-December 2003," Amnesty International,

<http://web.amnesty.org/web/web.nsf/print/05DC35ADBEE1EBF280256E900039CB05>.

²¹² Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, 155.

7.2 The Killing of the Brothers

In February 2003, after careful negotiation and approval, two Melanesian Brothers and a priest from Kolina on the Weather Coast went to visit Keke in an effort to dialogue for peace. They took with them a letter from the Archbishop of Melanesia trying to persuade him to return to the negotiating table.²¹³ Although reports are unclear whether they were able to meet Keke personally, the letter was delivered and one of the Brothers and the priest returned. The third, Br Nathaniel Sado, against the advice of his companions, decided to stay. A number of factors are important here: First, Sado should not have gone with the other two in the first place, he had already been posted to the Russell Islands but had gone along on his own volition. Secondly, Sado knew Keke well and had worked with Keke's brother, Joseph Sangu, during the disarmament process. Thirdly, Sado, "made the mistake of believing Keke would not harm him".²¹⁴ Previously Keke had always respected the Brotherhood and, at least on one occasion, had negotiated through them.²¹⁵ Fourthly, Sado was young and possibly naïve about what he was getting into. Finally, and perhaps crucially, Sado was from Savo, the same Island as Prime Minister Kemakeza, whom Keke now considered an enemy.²¹⁶

According to Brown, based on the "evidence" of a bank passbook he was carrying, Keke and his followers believed Sado was a "spy" hired by Kemakeza. He was subsequently tied up, beaten and tortured to death over the next three days, his captors allegedly beating a "confession" of spying out of him.²¹⁷ On Easter Day, one of Keke's followers ran away and reported to the national radio station that Sado had been

²¹³ Carter, *In Search of the Lost: The Death and Life of Seven Peacemakers of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 125.

²¹⁴ Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands, with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities", B: 4.

²¹⁵ When Keke took the Solomon Airlines aircraft and pilot hostage, it was the Brothers who helped to negotiate his release. See Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities," A: 5; Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands, with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities ", B: 3.

²¹⁶ Brown, "The Role of Religious Communities in Peacemaking: The Solomon Islands," 6-7. Sado would never have been sent officially by the Church because of his connection to Savo.

²¹⁷ Carter, *In Search of the Lost: The Death and Life of Seven Peacemakers of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 127.

murdered. The Brotherhood were shocked at this but were unsure whether it was true or not.²¹⁸

On 23rd April, six more Melanesian Brothers set out to find what had really happened to Sado. They were led by the Assistant Head Brother, Robin Lindsay, who was responsible for the welfare of all Brothers in Solomon Islands.²¹⁹ According to most reports, they made the decision to go themselves, informing the Archbishop of their intentions, but they did not tell him or anyone else of their plan to go to Keke directly and they had been advised by the Archbishop to go only to the Brothers' household at Kolina. If Sado was dead, then they planned to bring back his body for burial. They never returned, and reports came back to the Brotherhood that they were being held hostage but were alive and well. In an interview with the Solomon Star Newspaper Keke explained why they were being held:

(They)...did not come here with a good heart. They came here on a mission to spy on me. They were sent by the Church of Melanesia and the police. A senior police officer held a meeting and gave them some instructions before they came here.²²⁰

In June Keke took more hostages, including five Novices and two Brothers who were returning to Tabalia from another part of the Weather Coast. This group of seven lived with Keke for several weeks, and although initially treated badly, were ultimately well treated. Eventually they were released unharmed, but not before witnessing Keke and his followers attacking the Anglican village of Marasa, burning it to the ground, torturing and killing two young men suspected of being spies and kidnapping the parish priest.²²¹ Yet according to Carter, with the release of the Brothers:

Keke seemed reconciliatory. He even asked these novices to pray with his group and preach to him. He sent them back with pigs and shell money. We were so thankful to get the novices back safely but were worrying from their stories that none of

²¹⁸ Brown, "The Role of Religious Communities in Peacemaking: The Solomon Islands," 7; Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands, with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities", B: 4.

²¹⁹ Robin Lindsay is sometimes referred to as Reuben.

²²⁰ Ofani Eremae, "Brothers Tragedy," Solomon Star, 11th August 2003, 1.

²²¹ Carter, *In Search of the Lost: The Death and Life of Seven Peacemakers of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 142-143. Keke was a member of the SSEC church and Prime Minister Kemakeza is Anglican, this may have been a reason why an Anglican village was attacked. The parish priest Fr Lionel Logarata was later released unharmed.

them during their captivity had seen any sign of the original six brothers taken. When the novices were released, Keke said that he wanted a ceasefire and yet we did not understand why he had not released the original six²²²

In August, it was confirmed by the newly arrived Regional Assistance Mission that the Brothers had been killed. As more details emerged it transpired that three of them had been shot dead upon their arrival by a group of Keke's followers after apparently refusing to lie face down on the ground. (Keke was not with them).

In the recent murder trial, three of Keke's followers were sentenced to life imprisonment for their part in the murders. Part of their justification for the killings was that Brothers had "threatened" them with their holy walking sticks, believed to have magic on them.²²³

The three other Brothers were taken to Keke's camp, tortured overnight and shot the next day, although again it is unclear whether Keke was actually present.²²⁴ The killings provoked outrage within both Solomon Islands and the international community, although Keke and his followers continued to maintain that Sado was sent by the Prime Minister to spy on them and the other six were sent by the police, a claim strongly denied by both the Brotherhood and the Archbishop. People, trying to make sense of the event, also began to question Sado's involvement and the role of the Archbishop in the sending of the other six.²²⁵ The Archbishop, in response, stated his position very clearly:

I approved with clear instructions that six brothers, led by Br Robin, should go to the nearby Household to find out if the rumours of Br Nathaniel's death were true or not, and if they were true, to ensure that he had a proper Christian burial, or even, possibly, to bring his body back to Tabalia for burial there.

²²² Richard Carter, "A Message from the Brotherhood," *Solomon Star*, 11th August 2003.

²²³ George Hemming, "Former GLF Men Found Guilty Jailed for Life," *Ibid.* (2005),

<http://solomonstarnews.com/drupal/-4.4.1/?q=node/view/5648>.

²²⁴ "Amnesty International Solomon Islands: Covering Events from January-December 2003."; Brown, "The Role of Religious Communities in Peacemaking: The Solomon Islands," 7.

²²⁵ See for example Divine Kabau, "Probe the Brothers Tragedy," *Solomon Star*, 13th August 2003; Divine Kabau, "Archbishop's Decision," *Solomon Star*, 19th August 2003.

That was the only purpose of the mission....they were not sent by the government nor sent to spy on Harold Keke.²²⁶

Alongside the outrage was a national outpouring of grief climaxing in a requiem mass in August at the national cathedral in Honiara and later, after their bodies were exhumed, a State Funeral and burial at Tabalia in October.²²⁷ Over time, their graves have become a shrine and the Brothers referred to as martyrs, even before the Church had made any pronouncement on the matter.²²⁸

Today their deaths are remembered as a special day in the Church of Melanesia's lectionary and in the lectionaries of many other Anglican Provinces around the world, the liturgical colour for that day is red (for martyrs) and they have joined the panoply of saints and martyrs of the Church of Melanesia, even if there may still be doubt over Sado's own initiative and judgement.²²⁹ This perception of martyrdom only strengthened after Keke and his followers surrendered to the Regional Assistance Mission in August, and it is widely believed among Church of Melanesia members and beyond that this could not have happened without the Brothers' sacrifice. Others believe that the kidnapping of the Brothers in the first place was a major factor in RAMSI deploying to the islands.²³⁰ Carter, when trying to make sense of the event noted that:

Their deaths have brought the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Churches in the Solomon Islands and PNG and beyond to the Cross of Christ: away from simple magical understandings of the Brothers' power to the terrible sacrifice that is sometimes required of Christians to bring change and to confront the terrible tragedy of human violence, fear and prejudice.²³¹

Carter's interpretation of events is one among many that tries to make sense of the murders.

²²⁶ "Archbishop Admits Sending Brothers," Solomon Star, 14th August 2003. This claim is backed by the Head Brother in Priestly Habru, "Their Death Is Not in Vain," Solomon Star, 19th August 2003.

²²⁷ Attended by the author.

²²⁸ Interview with "K", May 2005, Honiara, Solomon Islands. See also Brown, "The Role of Religious Communities in Peacemaking: The Solomon Islands," 8.

²²⁹ Interview with "G", August 2005, Auckland, New Zealand. April 24th has been set aside to commemorate the seven martyrs of the Melanesian Brotherhood; it is a class II holy day. See *Church of Melanesia Lectionary 2005*, (Honiara: Church of Melanesia Provincial Press, 2005). A number of hymns have also been written commemorating their "martyrdom", including "The Legacy of Peace" sung at the burial service.

²³⁰ The kidnapping of the Brothers may have been a factor in the coming of RAMSI, but there were also other reasons for armed intervention, including Australian security concerns.

²³¹ Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands, with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities", B: 7.

In the next chapter I will look at what impact the killings had on the Brotherhood and people's perceptions of them, particularly in relation to their having or demonstrating mana. It is here that I will begin to articulate the theological problem central to this thesis.

Chapter 5

The Theological Problem

1. *Introduction*

This chapter will analyse the implications of the Brotherhood's association with mana and articulate the theological problem central to this thesis. While some of the information used here comes from printed sources, a significant amount comes from the results of my field research in Solomon Islands, carried out in April-May 2005 and Auckland between June and August 2005. During that time, I interviewed twenty-five informants including senior church leaders, members of the Melanesian Brotherhood, clergy of the Church of Melanesia, parishioners, members of other mainline churches and leaders in the disarmament program. The data collected from these interviews forms the basis for my identification and exploration of the theological problem crucial to my research.

Alongside this data, I also use Montgomery's book *The Last Heathen: Encounters with Ghosts and Ancestors in Melanesia*. Montgomery is neither a theologian nor an anthropologist but a travel writer and great-grandson of Henry Hutchinson Montgomery who, while Bishop of Tasmania, sailed to Melanesia on a missionary journey in 1892. In some ways the book is a retracing of the bishop's steps by a sceptical writer in search of the Melanesian magic and myths about which his great grandfather had written. Carter describes Montgomery as coming to Melanesia as the sceptical dilettante searching for myths, exposing them and being disillusioned at the same time.¹ Although written in a somewhat sensationalist style with numerous oversimplifications of events, Montgomery describes how his own journey and perspective was transformed by his encounter with the Melanesian Brotherhood.² It is his account of the Brothers and their identification with mana that is relevant for my research, in that he identifies a few

¹ Carter, *In Search of the Lost: The Death and Life of Seven Peacemakers of the Melanesian Brotherhood*, 185.

² Charles Montgomery, *The Last Heathen: Encounters with Ghosts and Ancestors in Melanesia* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2004), 156; Charles Montgomery, "Plunging into the Faith of the Melanesians," *Church Times*, 24th November 2006.

theological issues and difficulties that resonate with my own findings, but he doesn't explore them in any great theological depth.

2. *Mana as Success and Power*

In the early days of their ministry the Melanesian Brotherhood acquired a reputation for courage not only in the face of opposition from hostile villages but also when faced with the threat of spiritual harm from hostile ancestral spirits, ghosts or evil spirits. The apparent success of Brothers in converting Melanesians to Christianity and their apparent invulnerability to the mana of "traditional" spirits was interpreted by Melanesians as a sign that Brothers had access to a superior mana and could demonstrate it. Stories grew of their ability to cast out evil spirits, heal the sick and perform other miracles and signs.

The abilities and successes of Brothers in their ministry were interconnected with their association with mana, a mana derived from God and one which meant that they were under God's sure protection. Such an association with mana and the perception that Brothers are "powerful" continues in the history of the Brotherhood and was demonstrated in their "success" as peacemakers in the recent conflict and during the disarmament programme. The attitudes of militants, political leaders and members of the general public, both Anglican and beyond, seem to indicate that Brothers are revered, respected and feared because they are believed to have access to God's mana. Brothers are often inundated with requests to help cast out evil spirits, solve land disputes, pray for people's success in their careers, marriage, family life and many other situations precisely because God's mana is seen to work through them.³

Brothers, as members of a Religious Community, are believed to be able to do extraordinary things because they are made "holy" by living a life of constant devotion to God in prayer and with humility. Their lives, set aside for God, are channels for divine power and purpose. According to Carter, "...somehow this community of young men is able to do things that other Melanesians can't. And it's all through the grace of

³ Montgomery, *The Last Heathen: Encounters with Ghosts and Ancestors in Melanesia*, 257.

God. The brother's don't spend three or four hours a day in prayer for nothing you know".⁴

When people ask a Brother to pray for them, they are confident that prayer will be answered because of the Brother's association with mana. Brothers, by virtue of being in the Brotherhood, are considered to be in a close relationship to God and recipients of divine power which can be focused and directed towards others. Traditional Melanesian religions were essentially pragmatic in nature with the adherents concerned primarily with daily survival in a tribal context. People wanted success in the daily activities of life and hunting, fishing, good shelter, success in war, security, good health and so on, were all critical in that day-to-day survival. Religion provided a way to acquire it through a person's relationship to the ancestral spirits.⁵ In the Christian context, those same concerns are directed not to ancestral spirits but to God, and through the Brotherhood.⁶

Just as people are attracted to the Brotherhood based on the power of the Brothers, so this power is a motivation for young men joining the Brotherhood in the first place. While many join because they feel a genuine calling to serve God, the attraction of mana is also a contributing factor. Brothers, through their simplicity, humility and devotion to God, and as members of an indigenous Religious Order, have considerable power and status in Melanesian societies. They can go where others cannot. One informant noted that there is among the general public admiration of the Brothers and of the mana they demonstrate, admiration of something that those outside cannot access.⁷ In some ways the Brotherhood itself becomes an avenue for the acquisition of power, a power which is unavailable to those outside the Order. While this appears still to be the case, the murder of the seven Brothers has raised questions and issues regarding the nature of that power and how it operates within the Brotherhood, as will become apparent later in this chapter.

⁴ Ibid., 260.

⁵ As discussed in Chapters One and Two

⁶ Montgomery, on a visit to Honiara, claims he saw a chalkboard covered with written notes requesting the Brothers' help in praying for people's careers, marriages, their children's success in school exams and so on. This, he claims, was an indication of how people believed Brothers could direct God's help their way. See Montgomery, *The Last Heathen: Encounters with Ghosts and Ancestors in Melanesia*, 257.

⁷ Interview with A, May 2005, Tabalia, Solomon Islands.

3. The Individualization of Mana

The Brotherhood's association with mana is further complicated by the way in which people perceive or interpret how that mana operates through the lives of individual Brothers. For example there is among many people, including a number of informants to whom I spoke, a co-relation between the strength and efficacy of an individual Brother and his own personal behaviour and commitment to God. The more committed he is to the Brotherhood and to his vows the more likely is his own ability to direct mana to be stronger.⁸ This, according to one informant, involves people "testing" individual Brothers on the basis that if their personal character and behaviour are good and they are committed to the community, then their mana will be strong and their reputations enhanced.⁹

Here there is a tendency for people to individualize the mana concept in specific Brothers. While the specific skills and talents of individual Brothers are themselves signs of mana, the tendency to individualize leads to individual Brothers being tested, compared with others and, by implication, to some gaining reputations as being more powerful than others. Consequently, specific Brothers with reputations for good personal commitment and obedience to the Brotherhood and therefore stronger mana, would be sought out for prayer requests rather than those considered to have poor personal commitment and behaviour and therefore weaker mana.¹⁰

However, within the Brotherhood and the Church of Melanesia, many see mana not so much as an individual gift but one that comes from the heart of the community in order to help Brothers to be effective in ministry. Yet what is the Brotherhood's mana and what definition are we using? Mana is a many sided concept with any number of definitions. It can refer to personal abilities and talents of individual Brothers but also to Brothers' charisma, grace and authority and of having God's blessing in being successful in their work. If we define mana in this way, then by virtue of the success of

⁸ Interview with J, May 2005, Kohimarama; Interview with M, June 2005, Auckland; Interview with G, August 2005, Auckland; Interview with P, September 2005, Auckland; Interview with N, May 2005, Honiara; Interview with A, May 2005, Tabalia.

⁹ Interview with M, June 2005, Auckland.

¹⁰ Interview with M, June 2005, Auckland. This according to Whiteman is also the case among Church of Melanesia clergy. See Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 338.

their ministry and the remarkable authority with which they carry it out, Brothers do indeed have, or identify with, “mana”. In addition, if we define mana as power, we can again argue that by virtue of the respect they command and the significant work they do, Brothers are powerful and therefore have, or demonstrate, mana.

4. *Mana as Supernatural Power*

In chapter three, we saw how Brothers face considerable difficulties regarding their perceived use of mana. They are constantly being called on to demonstrate it, for example, to punish perceived sinners, sorcerers and adulterers or to defeat hostile magic or to find lost property mislaid in the bush leading to one informant claiming that in some people’s minds the Brotherhood is a kind of lost and found agency.¹¹ Such requests seem to imply that, for many people, the Brothers’ mana operates as a form of supernatural power. As one informant noted, “It all depends on the definition of mana. If it is defined as ‘magical power’, then while not denying God’s power, I do not like the image of Brothers having magical power for personal use. But people do think that way”.¹²

When mana is defined as a form of supernatural power for personal use it encourages a tendency to focus on the mana of individual Brothers and to consider it as an individual or personal possession. Mana becomes closely identified with specific Brothers who gain a reputation for the focussing and demonstration of God’s supernatural power.

The result can be a tension between, on the one hand, a mana that exists for the benefit of the Brotherhood Community and for efficacy in ministry, a mana which bestows the Brothers with authority, charisma, grace or blessing and, on the other hand, a mana that is wielded and exists for the benefit of the individual Brother or towards whomsoever it is directed. Brothers often find themselves caught up between the two. By virtue of being a member of the Brotherhood they are successful and empowered in ministry by God’s mana existing within the community, yet, they are also continually being asked to demonstrate a quite different form of mana, one that can be wielded and manipulated for the benefit of those who request it.

¹¹ Interview with G, August 2005, Auckland.

¹² Ibid.

In such a situation Brothers can very easily be tempted to believe that they can not only direct supernatural power for themselves but also that power can only operate through them. As one informant noted:

If it is to work [mana], it must be positive, but that doesn't rule out the possibility of some negative aspects, pride, a tendency to deviate from who is the real master. Who has the power? Who is doing the healing, the individual Brother or God working through him?¹³

Much of the respect and reverence generated by the Brothers stems from their demonstration of mana. It is this mana which explains why Brothers are able to go where others cannot; which enables Brothers to work with quiet authority; which enables and empowers Brothers to cast out evil spirits in clearance (or deliverance) ministry and which empowered Brothers to stand between the warring sides of the conflict and work for peace. Yet this mana can also create considerable fear, fear of crossing a Brother which is akin to crossing God, fear of the consequences of disobeying a Brother's instructions and fear of a Brother's curse which could lead to misfortune or death.¹⁴

5. The Fear of Cursing

The individualization of mana and the temptation for Brothers to wield it as their own personal possession and as a form of supernatural power leads to a quite different interpretation of mana with a much more negative connotation. Mana interpreted in such a way can lead not only to a misuse of that mana, but also to a misuse of responsibility and authority. Death, misfortune or sicknesses are often interpreted as a sign that someone has disobeyed a Brother or as the result of a Brother's curse. Montgomery, for example, writes of how one Brother in Vanuatu was believed to have cursed his own cousin after he had left the Anglican Church and threatened to break the Brother's walking stick. Consequently, the man was cut by a fish while swimming, caught an infection and died. Such a death may well have been coincidental, but people interpret it as the result of the Brother's curse. The Brother himself also appeared keen to maintain such an interpretation, particularly after he had refused to help the man

¹³ Interview with A, May 2005, Tabalia.

¹⁴ Montgomery, *The Last Heathen: Encounters with Ghosts and Ancestors in Melanesia*, 253.

when begged to do so by his family. He apparently later admitted to Montgomery that, “if Jim Bribol had lived, people would forget the power of the true God”.¹⁵ For all its dramatization, the fear and consequences of cursing is not an isolated incident or confined to Vanuatu. Stories such as a militant warrior paralysed after breaking a Brother’s walking stick, circulate widely in Solomon Islands and there are Brothers who admit to using curses or at least who think it justifiable to do so.¹⁶

It is also believed that only the specific Brother who has cursed a person can release him or her from that particular curse. In the case of the paralysed militant, the Brother involved had reportedly left Honiara and could not be contacted after the paralysis reportedly took effect. The militant later died allegedly because of the curse and because the Brother involved did not release him from it. As one informant explained, “People believe that they can be cursed and only be released by the individual Brother who originally cursed them. No one else can release them. This particular Brother knows what words and what curse he has used”.¹⁷

The result can be a climate of fear, fear of not doing what a Brother asks. So for example a threat issued by a Brother aboard the vessel “*Eastern Trader*” bound for Santa Cruz, that anyone stealing would bring down God’s punishment on the offender, is taken very seriously.¹⁸ In another example, the captain of a passenger ship refused to turn around and pick up a Brother after he had arrived late at the wharf and the ship had already left. According to one informant, the ship developed engine problems and promptly returned to pick up the Brother, after which the engine apparently began working normally again. Another example tells of how a captain would deviate from his route just to drop a Brother where he wanted to go, because failure to do so could incur the Brother’s anger and bring misfortune on the voyage.¹⁹ Even, according to another informant, during the Brother’s work with the Peace Monitoring Council, certain Brothers would ask for beer and cigarettes and their companions would supply them not only out of respect for the Brothers but also to avoid incurring their wrath.²⁰

¹⁵ Ibid., 155.

¹⁶ One of my informants is an example of this. Interview with F, May 2005, Honiara.

¹⁷ Interview with M, June 2005, Auckland.

¹⁸ Montgomery, *The Last Heathen: Encounters with Ghosts and Ancestors in Melanesia*, 272.

¹⁹ Interview with G, August 2005, Auckland.

²⁰ Interview with R, February 2006, Auckland.

The Brothers' mana is also transferable to formulated prayers and collects as well as walking sticks, oil, water and stones which can all become objects of power once a Brother has prayed over them.²¹ Such power and the fear it instils, encourage abuse in the sense that one's status and authority can be misused for personal gain or satisfaction. This opens up further avenues for abuse by some Brothers. Prayers and collects, for example, can be formulated not only for the use of blessings or curses but also for the personal wants and desires of individual Brothers.

This issue is not, however, exclusive to the Brotherhood. Some members of the clergy and students at the theological college reportedly use or formulate prayers using the secret names of angels taken from a dictionary of angels from the college library.²² Such prayers are written to angels associated with specific areas of expertise and, during my fieldwork, I was shown an old notebook full of such prayers handed down from one priest to another. Various prayers were addressed to specific angels associated with death, cursing, punishment, wealth, good health and so on. There were prayers to punish enemies, prayers to curse, prayers to "tie" a boy or girl, (meaning preventing them from getting married), prayers to "turn the mind" of any young girl desired and even one to forgive sin before actually committing it in the first place! According to some of my informants, some Brothers use similar prayers for their own personal use. Collects and prayers are jealously guarded and passed down from Brother to Brother for various purposes.²³ The issue here is that people believe that these prayers work and this belief enhances the reputations and power of Brothers who wish to misuse that responsibility and, consequently, instil fear. One informant, for example, spoke of how, after she had refused the advances of a particular Brother, he threatened her with a curse that she would never finish her education after which she promptly dropped out of school.²⁴ What is important here is that she believed that a Brother, abusing his mana and his responsibility as a Brother, had cursed her.

²¹ Carter, "Transforming Missionaries: Reflections on the Missionary Calling of the Brotherhood," 352-353.

²² See for example Gustav Davidson, *A Dictionary of Angels: Including the Fallen Angels*, First Free Press Paperback ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1967; reprint, 1971). This dictionary has been subsequently banned and removed from the library, although some of the angelic names and incantations have been copied and are in circulation. See also Montgomery, *The Last Heathen: Encounters with Ghosts and Ancestors in Melanesia*, 183.

²³ Interview with D, May 2005, Honiara; Interview with M, June 2005, Auckland; Interview with R, May 2005, Honiara.

²⁴ Interview with S, October 2005, Auckland.

Importantly, however, the use and abuse of mana is by no means universal in the Brotherhood. The majority of Brothers do not behave in this way or believe they can direct supernatural power for personal gain. Brothers who do misuse their mana and responsibilities are disciplined under the rules and procedures of the Brotherhood and subsequently released from the Order.²⁵ In addition, some Brothers and other Church of Melanesia members believe that any abuse of mana will eventually, to some extent, rebound on the user or the community itself. As one informant put it... “if mana is used wrongly, then the mana of the community will fail”.²⁶ The success of the Brotherhood is a visible and concrete sign that the community has mana but, if the community fails, or individual Brothers fail or suffer some kind of misfortune, then this, too, is a visible and concrete sign that something has gone wrong.²⁷

Yet many Melanesian Christians, firmly believe that Brothers can demonstrate mana as a form of individualistic supernatural power and continually ask them to do so. During his conversations with Richard Carter, Montgomery claimed that:

Brother Richard said he disdained magic that did not lead to God. That is why he was so worried about the Melanesian Brotherhood. Some people’s belief in the power of the tasiu and their walking sticks was verging on idol worship...Some members of the order had even begun to believe that they could direct supernatural power. All this talk of turning guns into snakes was causing them to develop a sense of invulnerability and spiritual pride. It was a trap, and it could only lead to more fear and superstition.²⁸

6. *Mana, European Theologies and Melanesian Worldviews*

In chapter two we saw how the mana concept operating in “traditional” Melanesian religions had been incorporated into local forms of Christianity. A similar process

²⁵ See for example *The Melanesian Brotherhood Prayerbook* (Honiara: The Provincial Press, 1996), 78-79, 82-83.

²⁶ Interview with E, May 2005, Kohimarama. These views were also expressed in two other informants. Interview with M, June 2005, Auckland; Interview with O, August 2005, Auckland.

²⁷ Fugmann writes of how a similar concept functions in Papua New Guinea illustrating the following example: After a local pastor was accused of adultery, one of his co-workers defended him by referring to the success of his work. The argument being that if he had done wrong, then this would have been reflected in his work being much less effective. See Gernot Fugmann, "Magic: A Pastoral Response," in *An Introduction to Melanesian Religions*, ed. Ennio Mantovani, *Point Series No. 6* (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1984), 223.

²⁸ Montgomery, *The Last Heathen: Encounters with Ghosts and Ancestors in Melanesia*, 263.

seems to have occurred in the Brotherhood and people's perceptions of them. Montgomery's impression of the Brotherhood was that they were operating like the "traditional" custom priests of old, except that the source of power was no longer ancestral spirits but God. He describes them as wrestling God back down to earth, where he was behaving much like a Melanesian ancestor spirit.²⁹

While this is a somewhat simplistic and generalized statement, there may be some truth in it. People flock to the Brothers with requests for prayers connected to their everyday life and survival, firmly believing that Brothers can direct God's mana for their benefit. God becomes a source of power to be channelled, directed and put to various uses. This becomes more explicit with the prayers to specific angels who at least appear to function as types of ancestral spirits in their own right and whose power some try to direct and use for themselves.³⁰

Yet, the issues are more complex and go beyond Montgomery's initial assessment. The relationship between the Christianity that Melanesians received and Melanesian worldviews creates a dynamic interaction leading to local forms of Christianity profoundly shaped and determined by the influence of both. Both the Christianity received and the Melanesian worldviews that it encounters are profoundly altered in the synthesis occurring between them. Such a process means that it is not purely Melanesian worldviews or cultures which determine the type of local Christianity that develops.

Montgomery's assessment of Brothers acting like "traditional" custom priests of old is only half correct, because Melanesian Christians are also determined by the type of Christianity and its theology that they receive and that this "Christianity" is, like Melanesian cultures, dynamic and fluid. For example, both Hilliard and Whiteman record how the dominant religious ideology of the Melanesian Mission had shifted from a moderate High Church variety to that of Anglo-Catholicism in the 1920s. This meant, among other things, far more emphasis on elaborate ritual, the rite of Holy Communion

²⁹ Ibid., 257

³⁰ Hagesi makes a similar point noting that: "People go to Church only to ask for what they need, but when they don't feel confident to do it themselves they ask the priests and teachers to do it for them. Thus priests and teachers are treated like magic practitioners and sorcerers in former days." See Robert Hagesi, "Towards Localization of Anglican Worship in the Solomon Islands" (B.D. Thesis, Pacific Theological College, Suva, 1972), 63.

being emphasised as the single most important act of worship for the Christian, and a stress on the public observance of Church festivals, Saints' days and the liturgical seasons. The shift in Mission theology would inevitably influence the beliefs and practices of Melanesian Christians including the Melanesian Brotherhood. The theologies of missionaries and missions are themselves a synthesis of inherited theological traditions, meaning that, for example, the Melanesian stress on God's mana being powerful on a practical level has parallels in European theological traditions. Some European versions of Christianity only became "spiritual" or interior to the individual when European Christians discovered that science was more powerful at a practical level than prayer.

Another example would be the stress on collects or prayers to angels or saints. While there is a Melanesian influence in that various saints or angels may, in the minds of Melanesians, operate like ancestral spirits, there is also a significant Christian influence in all of this. The stress on honouring saints or angels was inherited in the various Christian traditions and theologies received into Melanesia. The point is that Christian theology has as much influence as Melanesian worldviews on the type of Melanesian Christianity that develops and the Melanesian worldviews are themselves shaped and reshaped by the Christian theologies which result.

The mana concept and how it operates in the Brotherhood is both shaped and determined by how mana operated in "traditional" Melanesian worldviews and how it operates as a result of the fusion of Christian theologies and Melanesian worldviews. It is bound up with Melanesian concepts of community, relationships and exchange so, for example, Brothers receive or have access to mana when they become members of the Community, losing it upon release, as one informant put it:

Yes they possess mana. Perhaps it is because of the quasi-ordination process of being admitted as a Brother. Some people actually refer to the admission of Brothers as "ordination" or "consecration". People believe they receive "mana" if you will for lack of a better term, upon their admission. They lose it upon their release.³¹

³¹ Interview with D, May 2005, Honiara.

In this sense, a Brother has access to or demonstrates mana by virtue of being part of the Brotherhood Community, which ties in with why many see the Brothers' mana originating from the Community and not individual Brothers. Yet, the level of a Brother's mana is still tested by those who wish to see observable results of it as blessing, curse, protection, miraculous sign or some other form. The more committed a Brother is to his vow and the rules of the Order, the stronger his mana is perceived to become and the more it becomes apparent in the life of that Brother and how he affects others.

Here there is a comparison between how mana operated "traditionally" and how the concept operates in the Brotherhood. Just as, "traditionally", mana would only be given to those who maintained a right relationship to the spirits, similar is true of the Brotherhood. If a Brother does not maintain right relationship to God in the Community, then his mana will be weak or fail, or if he uses mana wrongly, he or the Community itself may suffer some kind of misfortune. Right relationship here would mean keeping his vow, following the rules of the Brotherhood, being committed and demonstrating it in his own personal behaviour. The "right" use of mana is essential for not only the well being of the individual but also the Community itself. Moreover, that mana can only be effective if the correct rules, procedures and rituals of that Community are followed. So for example if Brothers do not follow the rules of the Community, then this is a failure to maintain right relationship to God which, in turn, will lead to weak or failed mana.

Mana which originates from the Brotherhood Community empowers that Community in its ministry but it also exists alongside a mana which is individualized and wielded by individual Brothers, one that serves the individual purposes of that Brother. It is a mana which can be manipulated for personal wants and desires of either the Brother himself or the person who has requested it. Certainly here there is a comparison between a form of mana that can be manipulated at work in the Brotherhood and how mana used to function in Melanesian religions. "Traditionally" mana could be accessed and directed for the benefit of the adherent or his or her family and was requested specifically for the personal well-being and "life" of that person or family.

7. The Brothers' Problem

The murder of the seven Brothers, however, has raised theological questions over why and how these murders could have happened. Why had Brothers so highly revered, respected feared and well known for their spiritual power, been so brutally murdered? Why had Brothers who, throughout the conflict had been unharmed and in fact seemed imperious to physical harm, been so cut down by the powers of evil and violence? The key question generated here is how could this have happened to Brothers whose previous successes and protection in peacemaking were attributed to their access to and demonstration of God's mana? The murders generated questions over the effectiveness and nature of the Brotherhood's mana. Why had it seemingly failed to protect them and what was the reason or cause for this apparent loss or failure of mana.

A number of informants to whom I spoke told of how some believe that the Brothers died because they were not following their rules.³² The detrimental effect of working alongside organizations such as the Peace Monitoring Council, its effect on their community life and, in some cases, the breaking of their vows, has led some to believe that this has caused a loss of mana and a loss of God's special protection. Right relationship to God was not being maintained and so the seven Brothers who should have been protected were not, because the mana of the community is weak or has failed. There is a perception that after the intense focus of their peace-making efforts, the Brotherhood has become slack. One informant from another of the mainline churches noted that there was surprise among the general public that some Brothers were involved in excess chewing of betel nut, drunkenness and relationships with women. Even before the conflict, according to the same informant, the image of the Brotherhood had already been tarnished in Gizo, the capital of the Western Province, after rumours of a Brother being involved in a relationship and breaking his vow.³³ Another informant spoke of how, while Brothers are respected publicly, there is some criticism of their behaviour in private circles. During my field-work in mid 2005, I noticed that a number of Church of Melanesia clergy and laity were very critical of the Brotherhood in public

³² Interview with A, May 2005, Tabalia; Interview with D, May 2005, Honiara; Interview with O, August 2005, Auckland; Interview with L, May 2005, Honiara; Interview with M, June 2005, Auckland. Interview with N, May 2005, Honiara.

³³ Interview with C, May 2005, Honiara.

and on the streets of Honiara, something that I have not heard before, even in my five years of work in the Islands previously.³⁴

It is this perception of slackness in the Brotherhood which, for some, explains why the Brothers' mana is weak or has failed. The co-relation between the effectiveness of an individual Brother's mana and his own personal behaviour affects not only the individual Brother but can also extend to the Brotherhood community itself. If individual Brothers are slack then the mana of the community will also be weak. This means that the slackness of individual Brothers affects not only the efficacy of their own mana but also that of the community. In the case of the seven Brothers, it is not so much that the mana of the seven was weak but rather the behaviour and discipline problems of other Brothers have caused the community to be weak. The death of seven Brothers was an outward sign of the loss of mana.

This kind of view also extends to Brothers not following their rules or "correct" procedures. For one informant, things had gone wrong because the seven Brothers were not properly commissioned to go on the mission in the first place. For him, commissioning by the Father of the Brotherhood or another senior figure bestows authority; the mission failed because it was not commissioned or authorized.³⁵ Failure to follow the rules leads to failure of mission.³⁶ Again we see the idea that mana can only be effective if the "correct" rules, procedures and rituals of the Brotherhood are followed. Not being properly commissioned to go out on mission is interpreted as a failure to perform the necessary "ritual" to ensure that the relationship to God is maintained and, by implication, that mana can still be effective. These kinds of views lead to explicit questions being raised about the Brotherhood and its effectiveness, as summed up by Kelaepa:

Was there something gravely wrong with and within the Melanesian Brotherhood or the Church of Melanesia or their leadership for that matter? People asked why the Brothers had gone to the Weather Coast? Has God turned his face away from

³⁴ According to one informant, there is concern among both Church of Melanesia members and the Brotherhood itself that some Brothers are just going through the motions and not taking their vocation seriously. Interview with D, May 2005, Honiara.

³⁵ As noted in Chapter Four, Brothers were normally commissioned to go out on mission during a special service by the Father of the Brotherhood (Archbishop) or another senior figure acting on his behalf. In the case of the six Brothers going out to recover Br Sado's body, this did not happen and is a point of criticism for some.

³⁶ Interview with N, May 2005, Honiara.

the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Church? Had the Brotherhood compromised its integrity and or its position of neutrality in the conflict?³⁷

These questions seem to imply an apparent tension between the death of the Brothers as a consequence of following Christ's ministry which, in itself, has cultivated peace, against that of their deaths being a result of lost or failed mana. This tension is one felt within the Brotherhood, as one informant put it:

The Brothers' own view of mana appears to be changing, except for the conservative ones. It is difficult to let go of the manipulation of mana. Mana is to carry out Christ's ministry. The view of mana as making someone powerful is changing. It has nothing to do with them. God is no respecter of persons.³⁸

Another informant speaks of how some Brothers and members of the Church of Melanesia want to go back to what they see as the original "ideals" of the Brotherhood. There is a view that the Brotherhood has moved away from its roots in the sense that Brotherhood discipline is considered slack with Brothers no longer following the original rules and lifestyle of the Community. The implication here being that with the restoration of the original Brotherhood "ideal" comes a restoration of mana.³⁹

These views begin to illuminate the central theological problem that the Brotherhood is facing and it is one that has been made explicit in the murders, namely coming to terms with the loss of invulnerability and, at least in some people's eyes, the loss of mana. This coming to terms compels Brothers and others within the Church to ask explicit questions about the use of mana in the Brotherhood. What is the mana that Brothers are believed to demonstrate? What is it for? Are there different forms of mana operating in the Brotherhood and what is the difference between how Brothers see mana and the people's expectations of it outside the Order? These questions exist because of the tension between seeing the murders as the consequence of following Christ, which may and often does lead to the cross and/or as simply being the result of lost, failed or weak mana.

³⁷ Nigel Francis Kelaepa, "The Great Christian Paradox," *Church of Melanesia Newsletter*, October 2003, 7.

³⁸ Interview with A, May 2005, Tabalia.

³⁹ Interview with D, May 2005, Honiara.

What then does it mean to say that a Brother's mana is weak or has failed? It is not simply to say that he is unable to demonstrate or direct supernatural power but, more importantly, that God withdraws his blessing and protection from him. During the conflict, Brothers tirelessly worked for peace and not a single one of them was seriously injured or killed. The stories of bullets bending around them and guns refusing to fire, alluded to in the last chapter, were a visible sign of the Brothers special relationship to God and only strengthened the widely held belief that Brothers were under God's special protection. They seemed invulnerable to harm and their ability to make the warring sides listen and the quiet authority with which they carried out their ministry, are in themselves, signs of mana. Yet, the question remains that if Brothers are able to direct supernatural power, why did the seven fail to use it against Harold Keke and his men? If Brothers are under God's special protection, why were they not protected from harm?

For those who see mana as a supernatural power wielded by Brothers, there can be only one explanation, namely the mana failed and the Brother's power had deserted them. Why? The only possible answer is that something had gone wrong in the relationship between God and the Brotherhood: right relationship had not been maintained. This is particularly pertinent in Melanesian societies where "traditionally" nothing happened without a reason, or a cause. The Brothers died, it is argued, because their mana had failed, because in turn the Community's relationship to God had been broken or not maintained. Such an interpretation then allows people to point out the "slackness" of the Brotherhood or problems with discipline and behaviour as a direct cause of the failure of mana, and call for a return to the earlier "ideals" of the Brotherhood. Going back to how things were and to repair the relationship is the way to restore the lost mana.

The Brotherhood then finds itself in a difficult situation. As one informant put it:

It is not a case of Brothers telling people that they have mana; rather, people with their own Melanesian understanding of power have transposed the concept onto them, leading to the real temptation that Brothers believe they can wield supernatural power and behave like it.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Interview with P, September 2005, Auckland.

Yet the Melanesian Brotherhood is a community of young men who achieve a great deal not through the wielding of supernatural power but rather through their simplicity, humility and devotion to God. Brothers are successful because Melanesians trust them and, as an indigenous Religious Order, the Brothers are Melanesians themselves. The key concepts of community, relationships and exchange present in almost every Melanesian society are embodied in the Brotherhood community and in their ministry to people and communities outside. Brothers are able to go where others cannot because they are a community that belongs to Melanesians universally, regardless of tribal or inter-island identity.

The Brothers, then, face a significant theological problem. On the one hand those who believe Brothers wield or direct God's supernatural power point to the failure of that power and try to provide reasons why. Such explanations invariably point to a loss of mana and the Brotherhood being weak or having no power at all. The story of a drunken man sneering at a Brother and mocking him for no longer having any power is overly dramatic but, from my research it may well be true to say that people are recognizing, or at least beginning to come to terms with, Brothers no longer being considered invulnerable to harm or being superhuman.⁴¹

Yet, on the other hand, the seven murdered Brothers are described as "martyrs" with some believing that their deaths have brought a return to peace. Mana, here, is demonstrated not in invulnerability to harm but rather the opposite; vulnerability and sacrifice. Their deaths are "powerful" because they became a catalyst for the renunciation of violence in Keke's surrender and for the restoration of peace.

This indicates a kind of paradox operating within the Brotherhood. Brothers are highly respected simply by virtue of being a Brother, yet many of them are young men with very little, if any, formal education and very little status in their villages before joining. They are greatly feared yet, in the main, live a life of constant simplicity and poverty. They are believed to be empowered by God's mana working through them yet they belong to a Community based on principles of poverty, obedience and humility. It is this paradox which points to a theological tension existing within the Brotherhood

⁴¹ Interview with T, August 2005, Auckland.

between a theology of mana as power, the wielding of God's supernatural power and of blessing and protection from harm, with that of Christ who, on the cross, offers anything but sure protection from harm and the very opposite of claiming or directing power. This, argues Montgomery, is being played out in the Brotherhood, exemplified in his illustration of Brother Ken cursing in Vanuatu and his own experience of witnessing how a Brother was able to solve conflict by quietly praying:

And then Brother Francis stepped forward. He wore a shy half smile. He pulled off his wraparound sunglasses. He did not look at Johnson or the militants. He gazed at the trampled earth as though looking right through it, then towards the deep green folds of the highlands, then up to the sky, and then bowed his head. The militants seemed transfixed by his movements, like charmed snakes. The bickering trailed off. Brother Francis spoke softly, and his voice was like a breeze blowing through the yard, rustling through the dry grass, easing the weight of the humid afternoon. I could barely hear him. At first I thought he was reasoning with the militants. But his murmurs were too melodic for that. I realized he was praying when I noticed all the other bowed heads. The militants unclenched their fists. Their leader removed his aviator glasses. An immense calm settled on them all. Within minutes, the problem was settled.⁴²

The importance of this story is that Brother Francis was one of the murdered seven Brothers and that clearly had an impact on Montgomery:

How could I have known that he would go off to challenge the greatest darkness his country had ever seen and that he would be transformed by that journey....How could I have known that I was destined to return to the day that Brother Francis had whispered and chuckled and remained very small, so small that I had decided he was not central to the story until the moment he stepped forward and radiated something so infinitely good and true that the tension was washed from the afternoon and the men with anger and guns were made humble?⁴³

Montgomery is attempting to draw a distinction between the practice of mana as supernatural power to be manipulated and the mana of quiet humility and authority demonstrated by Brother Francis. Both are forms of mana and both can help to illuminate the theological issues here. The quiet humility of Brother Francis was

⁴² Montgomery, *The Last Heathen: Encounters with Ghosts and Ancestors in Melanesia*, 268.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 269.

remarkably effective. It dispelled both tension and fear, not instilled it. The death of Brother Francis, however, illustrated that Brothers are as vulnerable as any other human beings and it explicitly revealed that Brothers could be cruelly slain in the pursuit of Christian service, just as Jesus himself could be. The death of the Brothers has had a profound effect on the Brotherhood and in a sense is acting as a catalyst to bring the various theological tensions to a head. Kelaepa, writing in the aftermath of the killings, clearly recognizes this fact:

Is it now time for Melanesian Christians to be re-orientated away from a theology steeped in its emphasis on mana (power), to a theology of vulnerability, or is it a case of holding both together? These and other questions confront and strike at the core and heart of the Melanesian Christian faith.⁴⁴

8. *My Statement of the Problem*

The questions that Kelaepa raises and the issues that the Brotherhood are wrestling with go to the heart of Melanesian Christianity or the Anglican context at the very least. Expatriate writers such as Tippet and Whiteman point to a significant factor in the conversion of Melanesians to Christianity being the demonstration of a superior mana. Christianity, they contend, was judged not on the basis of intellectual argument but rather on how powerful it was, a concrete example being the fearlessness and determination of the missionaries in confronting and destroying custom houses and shrines without being struck down by the local gods.⁴⁵

Tippet's example of the cutting down of a sacred tree (referred to in chapter two) is, he contends, a demonstration of a superior mana more powerful than the spirits of "traditional" religions, a mana that was both demonstrable and observable in its results.

Melanesian writers have also followed this line of argument, including Boe, arguing that, the missionaries brought with them, "a whole world of things which have no analogy in the old Melanesian world". The goods and supplies that missionaries brought were a concrete sign that prayers and rituals of the new religion were effective because

⁴⁴ Kelaepa, "A Theology of Mana or a Theology of Vulnerability," 12.

⁴⁵ Ibid. See also for example Garry Trompf, "Missions, Christianity and Modernity," in *The Religions of Oceania*, ed. Tony Swain and Garry Trompf, *The Library of Religious Beliefs and Practices* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 209; Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 50.

they brought tangible results.⁴⁶ Both Hagesi and Mason maintain that the mana of Christianity was something quite new and desirable and accepted because of its power.⁴⁷

While I would concur that the issue of power is a major factor in Melanesian conversion there is, nevertheless, a danger of oversimplifying it into a “power” as a single-cause-explains-all theory of conversion that does not take account of the complex interaction between Melanesians and the various versions of Christianity they received. Davidson points out that Melanesians converted to Christianity for a number of reasons and attitudes towards the new faith varied enormously. While, access to material goods and new sources of mana was a factor, he also identifies others, including the new medicines and forms of healing the missionaries brought with them and the establishment of peace and an end to tribal fighting as factors which made Christianity more desirable. In addition, the motivation for individual Melanesian converts also varied enormously, “from those, who became Christians through the strange but powerful working of God in their lives, to those who became Christians for what they could get out of it”.⁴⁸

Nevertheless access to power is a factor but needs to be seen in the context of Mantovani’s argument that “fullness of life” was the highest value in Melanesian societies. Fullness of life here meaning good health, a successful family, plentiful food supply, security from enemies, success in war and so on which were all critical in day to day survival. Christianity with its superior mana promised greater access to this ideal in that it provided mana which could be focused and directed in pursuit of a greater experience of “full-life”. Seen in this sense, the acceptance of Christianity was more

⁴⁶ Hugh Blessing Boe, "The Missionaries and Their Gospel- the Melanesians and Their Response," in *The Church of Melanesia 1849-1999: 1999 Selwyn Lectures Marking the 150th Anniversary of the Founding of the Melanesian Mission*, ed. Allan K Davidson (Auckland: The College of St John The Evangelist, 2000), 137.

⁴⁷ Hagesi, "Towards Localization of Anglican Worship in the Solomon Islands", 44; Mason, "Church and Culture on Santa Ysabel", 88.

⁴⁸ Allan K Davidson, "Christianity in Melanesia: Some Historical and Missiological Reflections," (Held by Kinder Library, St John's/Trinity Colleges, Auckland., 1984), 19. Fugui and Butu make a similar point in that although, they claim, most converts tended to accept Christianity with the expectation of some tangible benefit from the change, some did so for “purer motives, and with a clearer perception of Christian doctrine.” See Fugui and Butu, "Religion," 82-83. Bennett too identifies how Christianity enabled the intermingling of people from different societies and the reconciliation of enemies both factors in encouraging Melanesian conversion. See Bennett, *Roots of Conflict in Solomon Islands Though Much Is Taken, Much Abides: Legacies of Tradition and Colonialism*, 4.

than a desire to acquire superior mana as a means to power, as an end in itself. Rather it was a means to an end, in that it meant gaining access to and ensuring the maintenance of a fuller and more successful “life” in a Melanesian context. According to Kelaepa:

The Christian God and His servants demonstrated awesome mana, and to the Melanesian mindset, an allegiance and service to Him would allow for a transference and receipt of this mana to enable one to have complete control over his/her own life, and those of others, friend or foe.⁴⁹

“Fullness of life” was available through access to the new and more powerful mana that Christianity offered. A mana accessed without the need for raiding, killing or ritual sacrifice that was required under the old religious system.⁵⁰ This is critical in helping us to understand Melanesian perceptions of the Brotherhood as directors of God’s mana and the various purposes it is put to. In addition, there is a co-relation between fullness of life and right relationship to God, if one is not in right relationship then one cannot experience fullness of life and may become sick, be unable to have children, suffer misfortune and so on.

Christianity came to Solomon Islands, to some extent, in a power encounter or confrontation with the existing religious systems. This, encouraged by some missionaries including Ini Kopuria, was a successful method for converting Melanesians.⁵¹ Often conversion took place when the superior mana of Christianity was demonstrated in some kind of power encounter or supernatural or miraculous happening. Consequently, the church in Melanesia was founded on the idea that God is directly active in miraculous/supernatural power encounters or through existing human institutions within society.⁵² To some extent, the entire foundation of the church in Solomon Islands is based on power and its observable results. Yet, this is not a question of Melanesians converting because they were forced to or because they had no choice in the face of a seemingly more powerful mana. Part of the conversion process involved Melanesians wanting access to the new Christian mana which could be directed as a

⁴⁹ Kelaepa, "A Theology of Mana or a Theology of Vulnerability," 12.

⁵⁰ Geoffrey White, "War Peace and Piety in Santa Isabel, Solomon Islands," in *The Pacification of Melanesia*, ed. Margaret Rodman and Matthew Cooper, *ASAO Monograph No. 7* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1979), 126. Also discussed in Hogbin, *Experiments in Civilisation: The Effects of European Culture on a Native Community of the Solomon Islands*, 180-181.

⁵¹ Macdonald-Milne, *The True Way of Service: The Pacific Story of the Melanesian Brotherhood 1925-2000*, 144. See also Ahrens, "Concepts of Power in a Melanesian and Biblical Perspective," 95.

⁵² Kelaepa, "A Theology of Mana or a Theology of Vulnerability," 12.

means to acquire “life”. Yet, the acceptance of Christianity meant the beginning of a complex interaction between various types of Christianity received and the various Melanesian worldviews that they encountered. Melanesians wanted access to the mana demonstrated, for example, in the stories of Moses in the Old Testament and the miracles of Jesus in the New Testament. The stories of Christian missionaries and members of the Melanesian Brotherhood demonstrating mana was evidence that the mana was real and observable. Importantly however, the type of Christianity demonstrated by missionaries and their role in “power encounters” with Melanesian religious systems determines the type of Melanesian Christianity that develops. When examining Christian conversion on Santa Isabel, White claims that:

Becoming Christian was seen as a way of gaining strength against attack, disease or misfortune by placing oneself in harmony with powerful supernatural forces. The best assurance of continuing well-being was assiduous adherence to mission ideals and routines. As a result, twice daily gatherings for prayer service and obedience to the new moral code were taken seriously.⁵³

Here the new mana of Christianity appears to function as the mana of ancestral spirits did before it, in that it could be accessed and directed for the benefit of its adherents. Mana was still needed in the new context to ensure fullness of life and for the benefit and protection of individuals. Yet the source of mana changes in that there is a recognition of Christian mana available from God which can only be accessed if right relationship to God is maintained. This, in the new Christian context, would mean, among other things, adhering to the Ten Commandments, obeying Christian teaching and attending church regularly. Failure to follow these rules would mean a withdrawal of God’s mana and sickness and/or misfortune would follow. The relationship could only be repaired through confession to the priest and forgiveness of sin. If the sickness and misfortune ceased, then this was a concrete sign of God’s forgiveness.⁵⁴ However, this interpretation of Christianity relies as much on the type of Christianity imparted to Melanesians as the Melanesian cultures it encounters. The importance of confession, the

⁵³ White, "War Peace and Piety in Santa Isabel, Solomon Islands," 135-136.

⁵⁴ A similar point is made in John D'Arcy May, *Transcendence and Violence: The Encounter of Buddhist, Christian and Primal Traditions* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 49. See also Simeon Namunu, "Spirits in Melanesia and the Spirit in Christianity," in *Religious Movements in Melanesia Today* (3), ed. Wendy Flannery and Glen W Bays, *Point Series No. 4* (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1984), 109.

need to restore relationships with God and forgiveness of sins are obviously not peculiar to Melanesia. They are bound up in the theologies of missionaries who impart their particular versions of Christianity to Melanesia which then interact with existing Melanesian concepts. For example, Hilliard claims that, Anglican missionaries established systems of moral discipline throughout Solomon Islands and Vanuatu in which “those baptized Christians who lapsed from the Christian sexual code usually absented themselves from daily services until they were prepared publicly to confess their wrongdoing before the rest of the village congregation”.⁵⁵ Missionaries such as Henry Welchman, working on Santa Isabel during the 1890s, established a system of ecclesiastical law by which baptized people who had committed certain offences were forbidden to attend church until a public confession and absolution.⁵⁶ It is this kind of theology which, in its interaction with Melanesian concepts, determines the kind of Christianity that develops and the Melanesian response to it.

According to Tippet, the initial encounter between Christianity and Melanesian religions took place on the level of daily life. Christianity was accepted because it was believed to be effective in ensuring success in daily life and in dealing with the very practical problems of daily survival.⁵⁷ Similarly, this is what Brothers are continually being asked to do by Melanesian Christians, to direct God’s mana in their direction for success in daily life. If Tippet is correct it suggests that Melanesians converted to Christianity because they saw within it a system which corresponded to, or at least had significant points of contact with, their own Melanesian worldviews.

On his visit to Nukapu where Bishop Patteson, the first Anglican Bishop of Melanesia, was killed, murdered in 1871, allegedly as payback for the kidnapping of young men by “blackbirding” slave traders, Montgomery tells of how objects connected to Patteson have become identified with his power.⁵⁸ For example, the ocean floor where his bones lay have, over time, become a reef and the site of the Bishop’s murder was apparently continually rising every year. Both of these, argues Montgomery, are interpreted by the locals as signs of the Bishop’s continual presence and power. More importantly,

⁵⁵ Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 235.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Tippet, *Solomon Islands Christianity: A Study in Growth and Obstruction*, 5.

⁵⁸ Nukapu is an outlying atoll inhabited by Polynesians. While this means they are culturally different from Melanesians, their proximity to Melanesia means they share considerable affinity with Melanesian cultures.

however, is his description of the iron cross erected on the site of the killing, which had now become a focus of that power.

It is at the site of the cross that, according to Montgomery, people come for healing from sickness, which involves holding the cross and the sick part of the body and using special prayers for healing. Moreover it also appears to function as a kind of lost and found agency, as one old woman informed him, "If you lose something in the bush, just go ask at the cross and you will find it".⁵⁹

More interestingly still is Montgomery's encounter with Silas, from Nukapu who claimed to have special access to Patteson's power and to wield it as a curse. In response to this experience he wrote:

A century after their conversion, the Nukapuans were now converting Christianity: Patteson had not banished the tindalo, the powerful ancestor spirits. He had become one. And here was Silas, threatening me with an invocation of the martyr's ghost.⁶⁰

Montgomery's illustrations provide us with an example of how Christian theologies interact with "traditional" worldviews to create local forms of Christianity. Patteson's death is interpreted in the Melanesian Mission literature as a "martyr's" death. According to Hilliard, while his contemporaries agreed that he had died because he was a white man in the wrong place at the wrong time Patteson was considered a martyr, "in the broadest sense of the word because he had been killed in the simplest performance of his duty".⁶¹ A mythology and symbolism built up around his death, embroidered with allusions to the passion of Christ and he was portrayed as a sinless victim of the evil slave trade who had embraced the martyr's crown.⁶² Such interpretations come out of the theologies and perceptions of "martyrdom" present in the High Church tradition and later Anglo-Catholic traditions of the Melanesian Mission. Fellow workers and members of the Mission who shared Patteson's ideals would almost inevitably describe their leader as a martyr. The point is that the association of power with objects

⁵⁹ Montgomery, *The Last Heathen: Encounters with Ghosts and Ancestors in Melanesia*, 290.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ David Hilliard, "The Making of an Anglican Martyr: Bishop John Coleridge Patteson," in *Martyrs and Martyrologies: Papers Read at the 1992 Summer Meeting and the 1993 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. Diana Wood (Oxford: Blackwells, 1993), 344; Fox, *Lord of the Southern Isles: The Story of the Melanesian Mission*, 26.

⁶² David Hilliard, "The Death of Bishop Patteson: It's Background and Effects," (n.d), 4-5.

connected to Patteson, such as the reef, the site of his murder or the iron cross is not a purely local interpretation of events with allusions to concepts of mana or ancestral spirit worship. It is an example of how European theologies of martyrdom, themselves products of theological interaction in Mediterranean/European traditions dating back to the apostolic traditions of the Early Church and the veneration of relics in medieval theological devotions, interact with local cultural concepts and worldviews.⁶³ The results are a synthesis out of which develop theologies that are neither purely European nor purely Melanesian but rather a fusion of varying European and Melanesian traditions.

The struggle of the Melanesian Brotherhood to come to terms with death among their community is also the struggle of a Melanesian theology of power coming to terms with powerlessness and vulnerability. Yet that theology is also the result of the continuous interaction between a received Christianity and Melanesian worldviews which shape and determine what “power” means in a Melanesian/Christian context. I have noted that Melanesians converted to Christianity partly because it offered access to superior mana to be directed towards maintaining and increasing their own fullness of life.

Whiteman already draws our attention to how ordination in the Church of Melanesia provides an avenue to access mana, and I suggest that the Brotherhood remains popular and sought after by Melanesian Christians, similarly, because they demonstrate a form of mana which serves as a powerful motivation for joining the Order in the first place.⁶⁴

Encounters or confrontations with power were important in the conversion process and, to some extent, this remains the case today. As one informant noted, Brothers often find themselves caught up in contemporary power encounters, an example being the perception that the Anglican Church is more powerful than other churches. This is seen for example in Br Ken’s challenge to the local Seventh Day Adventist pastor to engage

⁶³ See for example Joyce Ann Zimmerman, "A Theology of Liturgical Assembly: Saints, Relics and Rites," *Journal of The Liturgical Conference* 14, no. 3 (1998): 46-50; Diana Wood, ed., *Martyrs and Martyrologies: Papers Read at the 1992 Summer Meeting and the 1993 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, vol. 30, Studies in Church History (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993); Michael Perham, *The Communion of Saints: An Examination of the Place of the Christian Dead in the Belief, Worship, and Calendars of the Church*, Alcuin Club Collections No. 62 (London: Alcuin Club, 1980).

⁶⁴ Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 338.

in a duel of pointing Bible's at each other for three days, to see which one would be left standing.⁶⁵ Another example is the story recounted to me of a power encounter between a Catholic and Anglican priest at Gizo. Both threw axe heads into the sea and, using prayers, attempted to make them float to the surface. According to my informant, the axe of the Anglican priest did indeed float and was interpreted as a sign that God wanted an Anglican presence in the Western Province.⁶⁶ These stories reflect that issues of power are important and the secret prayers and names of angels used by some clergy and members of the Brotherhood are but another example of the importance of acquiring power and using it for individual benefit or directing it against enemies.

Yet, the Brotherhood's success in ministry and peacemaking during conflict is attributed to Brothers having access to mana in a Christian context and being empowered by it to do extraordinary things. It is God's mana that empowers Brothers for ministry, but the interaction of Christian theologies with Melanesian concepts will profoundly shape and reshape what that mana actually is, what it does and what it is for. The tension between forms of mana in the Brotherhood and the expectations of people about it, indicate that the interaction between theological traditions and cultures is a complex process. Yet it is a continuous process that creates the conditions for theologies to emerge out of the interaction and to address, for example, the mana concept in the Brotherhood, the Church of Melanesia and beyond. Theologies and cultures are fluid and will create and recreate new possibilities in the interaction between them, meaning that the mana concept has and is going through a significant change in the transition from "traditional" Melanesian usage to how it operates in a Christian context and that process of change continues, determined by that interaction.

⁶⁵ Montgomery, *The Last Heathen: Encounters with Ghosts and Ancestors in Melanesia*, 154.

⁶⁶ Interview with P, August 2005, Auckland. This kind of story is not unusual in Solomon Islands. There are many stories of priests and Brothers apparently performing extraordinary acts of power or miracle. Whiteman, for example, writes about a number of famous Santa Isabel priests including Eric Gnhokro, a priest famous for his mighty acts of power. Moving a mountain and making water spring out of the ground are but two examples of miracles credited to him. See Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 339-340. Hilliard also refers to one of the first local Santa Isabel priests, Hugo Hebala, who was also attributed with various minor miracles. See Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 219. Hilliard also recounts a story of Charles Fox's reputed supernatural powers. In Fox's own diary he wrote: "Boys told Michael [a missionary] a Roman priest & I were sitting under a coconut tree. He prayed & a branch fell down. I prayed and the whole tree fell down." See David Hilliard, "The God of the Melanesian Mission," in *Vision and Reality in Pacific Religion: Essays in Honour of Neil Gunson*, ed. Phyllis Herda, Michael Reilly, and David Hilliard (Christchurch: Macmillian Brown Centre For Pacific Studies and Pandanus Books, 2005), 211.

The reality of mana and the power and status that stems from it are concrete realities in the Brotherhood, but the death of the seven Brothers has raised questions over the very nature of that mana and how it operates within the Community. The expectations of people who ask Brothers to demonstrate or wield mana as a form of supernatural power, and the temptation of Brothers to use it for personal gain, stand in tension with the mana of the Community which empowers Brothers for ministry. Similarly, a mana which is individualized as a personal possession of specific Brothers also stands in tension with a mana which is communal and flows out of the Brotherhood and which exists for that Community. In this case, it is not a possession but rather a divine communal empowering of Brothers for efficacy and assistance in Christian ministry and not for the building up or personal gain of individuals.

Montgomery's distinction between the cursing of Brother Ken and the quiet humility of Brother Francis is perhaps symbolic of the struggle that the Brotherhood and the Church is facing. A struggle between mana as a power to be manipulated and directed to one's ends to control, possess or curse and the power of a mana which is neither claimed nor directed but instead naturally radiates and empowers a Brother to overcome aggression with simple humility.

The interaction between Christian theologies and Melanesian concepts means that the mana concept prevalent in Melanesian worldviews continues to operate in Melanesian Christianity and particularly within the Melanesian Brotherhood. Yet, as the mana concept is shaped and reshaped by this interaction, various versions of what mana is and how it should operate come to the fore. The death of the seven Brothers has not only raised questions over the existence of mana in the Brotherhood Community but also its very nature and the motivation for using it in the first place. Here we see the tension between, on the one hand, a form of mana that seems to operate as it once did in Melanesian religions, (albeit with some modifications for the Christian context), as something to be accessed and manipulated for the success of the wielder and, on the other hand, Brothers living lives of simple humility and ministry towards others without giving a thought to their mana. It is the latter which has its origins in Christ, whose mana is revealed not in the acquisition of power, but rather in the relinquishing of it on the cross. The use of mana and the motivation for using it are key questions, then, at the heart of our discussion and in the next chapter I shall explore how Melanesian theology

deals with the mana concept with a view to finding a way forward in addressing this theological issue.

Chapter 6

Melanesian Theology

The theological problem identified in the previous chapter, revolves around the tension between a mana, which exists for the empowerment of the Brotherhood Community, and one, which is individualised as a personal possession and wielded for personal benefit. The issue then concerns the nature of mana operating in the Brotherhood and the motivation for using it. In this chapter I will examine Melanesian theology in an attempt to find a way forward in addressing this theological tension. My analysis will include an overview of Melanesian theology, sections on the role of the expatriate in the process of doing it, emerging themes or issues in Melanesian theology and a final section exploring work undertaken on mana and its relationship to Christianity.

As far as possible, I will situate the theologians referred to noting whether they are Melanesians or expatriates and the various Christian denominations they represent, all of which become critical as we explore Melanesian theology in depth. Although Melanesia includes the peoples of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Fiji within its region, I have elected to omit Fiji from our discussion primarily because it is culturally and socially quite different from the other Melanesian countries and the theology developed there will reflect this. Its proximity to Polynesia means that Polynesian theology has an impact on Melanesian Fijian theology. Our omission of Fijian theology is not a dismissal of Fijian theological reflection but rather the recognition that even without it, Melanesian theology is still incredibly diverse and the inclusion of Fiji would simply add more cultural and social diversity taking us beyond the scope of this thesis.

1. *Melanesian Theology: An Overview*

Anyone attempting an overview of Melanesian theology will realize that it is an emerging theology in the process of construction across Melanesia. Any examination of this emergence over the last few decades will demonstrate that it has evolved from being a number of tentative and preliminary discussions to suggestions for models or

methodology for doing Melanesian theology, through to examples of theologians actually doing it in practice. I will therefore look at these decades in order to chart this process in more detail.

1.1 The 1970s and 1980s

These two decades saw the beginnings of Melanesian theology emerging initially from academic institutions across the Pacific such as the Pacific Theological College based in Suva, Fiji. Throughout the 1970s Melanesian theologians, studying there, such as Tuza, Hagesi, Suri and Tavoia were all articulating attempts to develop an indigenous Melanesian Christianity.¹

The development of the Melanesian Institute in Papua New Guinea in 1968 was also significant. This was a Catholic innovation born out of the new optimism and vision of the Second Vatican Council and largely the incentive of sympathetic expatriates working in Melanesia. Initially it was set up to assist both Melanesian and expatriate church workers to gain a deeper insight into the history, cultures and societies of the Melanesians they were serving. The Institute also regularly published three academic journals dedicated to social, cultural and religious issues in Melanesia: *Catalyst* (first published in 1971), *Point* (first published in 1973) and *Umben* (first published in 1983).² These three publications along with the *Melanesian Journal of Theology*, first published in 1985, have provided theologians with an outlet to discuss theology in Melanesia and the possibilities of developing Melanesian theology.

¹ See Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 417; Esau Tuza, "Towards Indigenization of Christian Worship in the Western Solomons" (B.D. Thesis, Pacific Theological College, Suva, 1970); Hagesi, "Towards Localization of Anglican Worship in the Solomon Islands"; Ellison Suri, "Music in Pacific Island Worship with Special Reference to the Anglican Church in Lau Malaita Solomon Islands" (B.D. Thesis, Pacific Theological College, Suva, 1976); Michael Tavoia, "Towards Melanesian Christianity with Special Reference to Belief in Spirits in Islands of North Pentecost" (B.D. Thesis, Pacific Theological College, Suva, 1977).

² Gerald A Arbuckle, "The Founding of the Melanesian Institute," in *25 Years of Service: The Melanesian Institute: Its History and Its Work*, ed. Ennio Mantovani, *Point Series No. 19* (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1994), 22-27; Hermann Janssen, "Vision and Foundation of the Melanesian Institute," in *25 Years of Service: The Melanesian Institute: Its History and Its Work*, ed. Ennio Mantovani, *Point Series No. 19* (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1994), 28-38.

Other significant contributions included the *Melanesian Culture and Christian Faith* and *New Hebridean Culture and Christian Faith* workshops held in Solomon Islands in 1978 and Vanuatu in 1979 respectively. These workshops, co-ordinated by expatriate Australian Cliff Wright were designed to explore the relationship and interaction between Melanesian cultural beliefs and Melanesian Christianity, thereby initiating discussion into Melanesian theology.³

In 1977 the Point series published *Christ in Melanesia*, a collection of articles written to “stimulate Melanesian Christians, especially Melanesian theological students, to write up their theological response to the current and at times strident demands for a Melanesian Christianity”.⁴ *Christ in Melanesia* was significant because among the most important articles were Narokobi’s *What is Religious Experience for a Melanesian?* and Gaqurae’s *Indigenisation as Incarnation – The Concept of a Melanesian Christ*. Although there were other significant articles in the book, written by sympathetic expatriates, Narokobi and Gaqurae were the only Melanesian contributions and represented some of the first published works by Melanesians in exploring the possibilities for Melanesian theology. Narokobi argues for the rediscovery of Melanesian religious experience as a source for Melanesian theology.⁵ Gaqurae, on the other hand, argues for the concept of the “Melanesian Christ”. Melanesians, he claims, perceive Christ as foreign and brought in from outside. It is only when Christ “becomes” Melanesian that he will have any real meaning for Melanesians.⁶

Both articles clearly had an influence on later Melanesian theologians searching for a theology that is “Melanesian” and distinct from “Western” theology. Melanesian theologians such as Burua and Kadiba, point to how, in their view, a major difficulty in this process is that theological colleges across Melanesia follow a “Western” orientated

³ Cliff Wright, "Melanesian Culture and Christian Faith: Report of an Education Workshop, Auki, Malaita, Solomon Islands October 12th-26th, 1978," (Auki: Solomon Islands Christian Association, 1978); Cliff Wright, "New Hebridean Culture and Christian Faith: Two Heads & Two Hearts Report of Education Workshop Aulua, New Hebrides April 19- May 3 1979," (Port Vila: Pacific Churches Research Centre, 1979).

⁴ Theodor Ahrens and James Knight, "Introduction," in *Christ in Melanesia*, ed. James Knight, *Point Series* (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1977), 6.

⁵ See Bernard Narokobi, "What Is Religious Experience for a Melanesian?," *Ibid.* (The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service), 7-12.

⁶ Joe Gaqurae, "Indigenisation as Incarnation- the Concept of a Melanesian Christ," *Ibid.*, 146-153. Both Gaqurae and Narokobi’s articles are of such significance that they were reprinted in *Living Theology in Melanesia: A Reader*. According to the editor, their “classic” status alone being enough to justify their inclusion.

curriculum that needs to be replaced with one dealing directly with Melanesian context.⁷ The written introductions of both *Christ in Melanesia* and the later *Living Theology in Melanesia: A Reader* suggested that theological colleges were not the best places for formulating Melanesian theology because they were too far removed from the life and experience of ordinary Melanesians. They suggest that the predominance of “Western” theology in those institutions actively inhibit the emergence of Melanesian theological questioning and reflection.⁸ The Filipino contextual theologian Mercado asks the question, if the graduates of Melanesia’s seminaries are Westernised, what type of Gospel will they proclaim to their people? His answer is that it is likely to be a Western Christ removed from the experience of Melanesians.⁹

Following Gaqurae, Kadiba argues that Christian traditions in Melanesia remain foreign in character and expression and consequently Melanesians are alienated from their traditional ways and their Christianity is foreign. It is only when people look through Melanesian eyes and not be bound by present traditions and foreign theologies that a Melanesian theology will develop.¹⁰ Both Burua and Kadiba draw attention to the contribution of those outside theological institutions arguing that theological discussion could be strengthened if theology was more “people orientated” instead of simply the intellectual exercise of the few in theological colleges.¹¹ Any development of Melanesian theology must come from the experiences of the people, not from theological institutions.¹²

May, an expatriate Catholic, concurs arguing that much theology is being done in villages across Melanesia. He describes the various prayers and hymns, included in *Living Theology in Melanesia: A Reader* from various parts of Papua New Guinea as

⁷ John Kadiba, "In Search of a Melanesian Theology," in *The Gospel Is Not Western*, ed. G W Trompf (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987), 139-147.

⁸ Ahrens and Knight, "Introduction," 6; John D'Arcy May, "Progress and Problems of Indigenous Theology in Melanesia," in *Living Theology in Melanesia: A Reader*, ed. John D'Arcy May, *Point Series No. 8* (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1985), ix-x.

⁹ Mercado, "A Proposal for Constructing Melanesian Theology," 69; Bernard Narokobi, "What Is Religious Experience for a Melanesian?," 11-12.

¹⁰ Kadiba, "In Search of a Melanesian Theology," 141; Tony Swain and Garry Trompf, eds., *The Religions of Oceania*, The Library of Religious Beliefs and Practices (London: Routledge, 1995), 218.

¹¹ Albert Burua, "Theology and Melanesia," *Point*, no. 1 (1980): 11-12; Swain and Trompf, eds., *The Religions of Oceania*, 218.

¹² John Kadiba, "In Search of a Melanesian Theology," in *The Gospel Is Not Western: Black Theologies from the Southwest Pacific*, ed. G W Trompf (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987), 143.

“among the primary sources of Melanesian Theology”.¹³ Writing in 1985 May noted that the future of theology in Melanesia depends on the resolution of a tension between the popular religion of the people that is interpreted and expressed in Melanesian terms and the official religion of the churches with its “Western” orientation and bias. The resolution of this tension may well depend on Melanesians writing and developing Melanesian theology themselves, drawing from the rich and diverse experiences of their own people and context.¹⁴

The search for a theology that speaks meaningfully to Melanesians was one of the main themes of *Living Theology in Melanesia: A Reader*. This was a significant book because, apart from the introduction, every article was a Melanesian contribution towards developing an indigenous theology. That same year saw *The Melanesian Journal of Theology* publish two significant articles from Solomon Islanders that reflected on the beginnings of Melanesian theology in theological institutions in Solomon Islands. Both writers from the United Church and Anglican contexts, identify similar examples of implicit “God talks” being carried out in the classrooms of theological colleges, through personal reflection, involvement and communal reflection.¹⁵

Much of the theology written in this period, however, tended to be suggesting models or methodologies for doing Melanesian theology rather than actually doing it and this is reflected in the titles of books and articles written by Melanesian theologians or expatriates doing theology in Melanesia. Examples include: *Towards a Melanesian Christian Theology*, *In Search of a Melanesian Theology*, *Fundamental Issues for a Melanesian Theology*, *A Proposal for Constructing Melanesian Theology*, *Instances of God-Talks in Melanesia*, *Some Thoughts on Possible Challenges for a Melanesian*

¹³ May, "Progress and Problems of Indigenous Theology in Melanesia," ix; "Village Theology: Expressions of Living Faith in Melanesia," in *Living Theology in Melanesia: A Reader*, ed. John D' Arcy May, *Point Series No. 8* (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1985), 1-66. The situation in Solomon Islands is similar with hymn writers such as Ellison Suri composing hymns that reflect Melanesian context. Suri an Anglican Priest from Malaita in Solomon Islands has written a number of hymns in both English and Pijin for the Melanesian context. See in particular *Let All the Islands Sing*, (Honiara: St Nicholas Christian Communication Centre, 1984; reprint, 1993), 32, 75, 110, 295.

¹⁴ May, "Progress and Problems of Indigenous Theology in Melanesia," xiii.

¹⁵ Esau Tuza, "Instances of 'God-Talks' in Melanesia," *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 1, no. 1 (1985): 49.

Theology, Models Towards a Melanesian Christianity and so on.¹⁶ While there was agreement about the need to do Melanesian theology, there were also calls for theologians to move beyond the stage of suggesting models and methodologies to actually doing it. In the words of Filipino theologian Mercado, “much of the cry is ‘let us do Melanesian theology’ but little action has been done”.¹⁷ It is noticeable however that he then goes on to suggest another proposal for constructing Melanesian theology!

The task of proposing or constructing Melanesian theology however was problematic as there were significant discussions around what Melanesian theology will or should be. In a significant article, Tavoia, a ni-Vanuatu, maps out the challenges for a Melanesian theology to consider around the immense cultural diversity of the Melanesian region and people. While conceding that there are some similarities that hold Melanesian beliefs and ideologies together, he also points out the significant underlying differences that identify each particular society and culture. He therefore asks the question: what theology would a Melanesian theology be? Would it be a compromise that systematises the varying views of Melanesian societies, or a regional theology produced within the different regions of Melanesia?¹⁸ In any case, he partly answers his own question stating that, “such a general approach will not be a good enough basis for a Melanesian theology as such because it will not fully express Melanesian thoughts”.¹⁹

Tavoia’s question and its implications have reverberated around the construction of Melanesian theology ever since and there have been various responses to the issue in the following decades. For example Papa, a Melanesian, shares Tavoia’s view and chooses to limit his own study of reconciliation to the Melpa culture of Papua New Guinea and not extend it to the general Melanesian situation. One reason for doing so is

¹⁶ See for example Kadiba, "In Search of a Melanesian Theology," 139-147; Mercado, "A Proposal for Constructing Melanesian Theology," 69-76; Tuza, "Instances of 'God-Talks' in Melanesia," 47-60; Michael Tavoia, "Some Thoughts on Possible Challenges for a Melanesian Theology," *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 11, no. 1 (1985): 25-29; Gernot Fugmann, "Fundamental Issues for a Melanesian Theology," in *An Introduction to Ministry in Melanesia*, ed. Brian Schwarz, *Point Series No. 7* (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1985), 72-103; Rufus Pech, "Models Towards a Melanesian Christianity," *Catalyst: Social Pastoral Journal for Melanesia* 14, no. 2 (1984): 144-157.

¹⁷ Mercado, "A Proposal for Constructing Melanesian Theology," 70. Hagesi seems to echo a similar point claiming that there has been a desire for a Melanesian theology but paradoxically no genuine interest in its development. See Robert Hagesi, "Towards a Melanesian Christian Theology," *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 1, no. 1 (1985): 17.

¹⁸ Tavoia, "Some Thoughts on Possible Challenges for a Melanesian Theology," 27.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

that, “there is too much cultural diversity to be able to speak meaningfully about Melanesia”.²⁰ Such a view is in contrast to that of the expatriate Catholic Mantovani who claims that, “What is true for PNG in general is, most probably, true for the whole of Melanesia”.²¹

In any case, to attempt to develop Melanesian theology at all is evidence that theologians consider there is enough “common ground” to be able to generalize in this way, as illustrated for example in Kadiba, and two later works from the expatriate anthropologist Garry Trompf and Arnold Orowae a Catholic priest from Wabag in Papua New Guinea.²²

What is noticeable however is that although Melanesian theology was at a tentative and preliminary stage, there were writers calling for theological reflection in Melanesia to be recognized as uniquely Melanesian and distinct from the European theological traditions that had been inherited. For example, Kadiba argues that although there is a need for systematic Melanesian theology, it does not have to be “systematic” in the “Western” sense of the term “following Western categories, or making absolute statements of faith”. Rather, “It would be more truly contextual if it set forth guiding principles, systematically laid down to help Melanesians to do and think theology in the thought forms and symbols relevant to them”.²³ Tuza agrees by suggesting that Melanesian theological reflection may in fact be so different from “traditional” Christian views that it may appear “heretical” but may well be “cultural” and “authentic” from a Melanesian viewpoint and reflect authentic religious expressions.²⁴

The stress on Melanesian religious experience as a source for Melanesian theology and for an understanding of Christ as Melanesian was the beginning of a process where theologians, both expatriate and Melanesian, worked to “rediscover” Melanesian cultures as valuable sources for theological reflection and for dialogue with various versions of Christianity received into Melanesia. Such a process leads to two things:

²⁰ Papa, "The Sacrament of Reconciliation in Melpa," 46.

²¹ Ennio Mantovani, "Key Issues of a Dialogue between Christianity and Culture in Melanesia," *Sedos Bulletin* (1999), <http://www.sedos.org/english/mantovani.html>.

²² Kadiba, "In Search of a Melanesian Theology," 139-147; Trompf, *Melanesian Religion*, 260-273; Arnold Orowae, "A Universal Approach to Melanesian Theology," *Catalyst: Social Pastoral Journal for Melanesia* 27, no. 1 (1997): 77-103.

²³ Kadiba, "In Search of a Melanesian Theology," 147.

²⁴ Tuza, "Instances of 'God-Talks' in Melanesia," 57.

first, a positive reassessment of Melanesian cultural concepts and myth stories as potential dialogue partners for Melanesian Christianity, and secondly a reassessment of European missionaries and their interpretation of the cultures they were working in.

A number of theologians, both expatriate and Melanesian argue from the premise that European missionaries had largely misunderstood “traditional” Melanesian religions, often condemning “traditional” symbols or religious systems. Prominent expatriate authors such as Mantovani were taking leading roles in reassessing Melanesian cultures, missionary misunderstandings of them and their suitability as sources for developing Melanesian theology.²⁵ He argues that the Melanesian religious experience was never the object of serious reflection and there was no dialogue between Christianity and Melanesian cultures. Consequently, there has been a misunderstanding of those cultures.²⁶

Similarly, other expatriate theologians such as Ahrens, a Lutheran pastor working in Papua New Guinea, were assessing the context of power encounters between Melanesian and European cultures and questioning whether the missionaries’ understanding of power actually matched that of Melanesians and the Melanesian worldview. His assessment of the missionary response to “cargo cults” is that it was a question of misunderstanding and the result of “culture conflict”.²⁷ Pech draws our attention to the fact that, in his view, nothing had been done in the past to evaluate positively or even to understand the mythology, religious beliefs, symbolism or liturgy of “traditional” Melanesian cultures.²⁸

Fugmann, an expatriate Lutheran, has attempted to do this, arguing that in the context of the mythological nature of Melanesian religious systems, it is important that church workers, particularly pastors, recognize that they are dealing with a system, not isolated

²⁵ See for example Ennio Mantovani, "Traditional Religions and Christianity," in *An Introduction to Melanesian Religions*, ed. Ennio Mantovani, *Point Series No. 6* (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1984), 1-22; Ennio Mantovani, "What Is Religion?," in *An Introduction to Melanesian Religions*, ed. Ennio Mantovani, *Point Series No. 6* (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1984), 23-48.

²⁶ Ennio Mantovani, "Key Issues of a Dialogue between Christianity and Culture in Melanesia," <http://www.sedos.org/english/mantovani.html>. See also Tippett, *Solomon Islands Christianity: A Study in Growth and Obstruction*, 100-101. He has a similar view regarding the missionaries’ understanding of mana.

²⁷ Ahrens, "Concepts of Power in a Melanesian and Biblical Perspective," 95-96.

²⁸ Rufus Pech, "Models Towards a Melanesian Christianity," *Catalyst* 14, no. 2 (1984): 153.

phenomena.²⁹ His article is an attempt to take Melanesian mythological concepts seriously. Other expatriate theologians were attempting to work from specific Melanesian myth and culture stories as a possible source or foundation for Melanesian theology. Examples include Thimme's evaluation of Manarmakeri, a Biak myth from Irian Jaya, Mantovani's examination of the Dema myth of Papua New Guinea and Pech's later assessment of Manub and Kilibob a popular myth in North East New Guinea.

The Lutheran missionary Horndasch observes that, at least in some areas of Papua New Guinea, Melanesian Christians were taught to throw away and reject all their traditional customary practices, ceremonies, symbols, songs and dances. In place of these, they were taught to accept Methodism, Congregationalism, Lutheranism, Catholicism, Anglicanism and so on. Consequently, the denominational conflicts of the "Western church" are introduced into the Melanesian context creating completely new religious divisions.³⁰ In addition, Kadiba adds that theologies in Melanesia today are labelled "liberal", "evangelical" and "charismatic" but that these theological labels are creations of "Western" Christians and not Melanesians and that such traditions and doctrines brought from outside have divided tribes, clans and families instead of uniting them.³¹ This is precisely why Melanesian writers such as Avi stress strongly the importance of Ecumenism in the context of a society already divided by tribe and clan and further divided by theological labels brought in from outside.³²

Although expatriate theologians were taking leading roles in the assessment of Melanesian myths and cultures as a resource for Melanesian theology, Melanesian authors were suggesting this as far back as the 1970s. Alongside Narokobi's call for Melanesian religious experience to be taken seriously as a theological source, other Melanesian authors were calling for a reassessment of Melanesian cultures across the region. Early examples include Tavoia, who writing about his own culture on North Pentecost in Vanuatu, argues that missionaries never understood the existing religious systems. If they had, they could have identified the Christian God with that of *Tagaro*,

²⁹ Fugmann, "Fundamental Issues for a Melanesian Theology," 74.

³⁰ Helmut Horndasch, "Theology and Christian Spirituality in the Melanesian Context," *Catalyst: Social Pastoral Journal for Melanesia* 28, no. 2 (1988): 120.

³¹ Kadiba, "In Search of a Melanesian Theology," 141.

³² Dick Avi, "Contextualisation [Sic] in Melanesia," *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 4, no. 1 (1988): 18.

an existing concept of an almighty and creator God already present in the religious system.³³

Similarly Avi, writing in the Papua New Guinea context, argues that missionaries and anthropologists never saw the distinction between “traditional” ancestor spirits and nature spirits and condemned them all as animistic and primitive. Perhaps, he suggests, if family relationships to the ancestors were considered more positively, it may strengthen the argument that God was already in Melanesia before the missionaries arrived.³⁴

Baldwin, writing from Vanuatu, also raised questions over the interpretation of Melanesian concepts by expatriate missionaries claiming that there is a tension between what he sees as the largely materialist culture of European missionaries and Melanesian worldviews. He concludes that the missionary cannot relate to the spirit world as a Melanesian does, because, in a sense, the Melanesian is more a believer than the missionary is. The cultural differences between both ensure that European missionaries cannot really understand Melanesian worldviews and consequently misunderstand them.³⁵ Mason, from Santa Isabel, Solomon Islands also questioned the interpretation of Melanesian concepts by expatriate missionaries. For example, he refutes the view held by prominent expatriate writers and missionaries such as Codrington and Montgomery that Melanesians had no belief in evil spirits or “devils” and that these were concepts introduced by missionaries and traders.³⁶

Other Melanesian theologians, such as Boseto, were calling for a positive evaluation of Melanesian myths in comparison to Christianity, and Apea’s assessment of the Yakili myth of the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea represents one of the first attempts by a Melanesian theologian to assess specific Melanesian myth stories positively and as a source for Melanesian theology.³⁷

³³ Tavoia, "Towards Melanesian Christianity with Special Reference to Belief in Spirits in Islands of North Pentecost", 26-27.

³⁴ Avi, "Contextualisation [Sic] in Melanesia," 16.

³⁵ Lonsdale J Baldwin, "The Church and Development - Melanesian Perspectives" (S.Th. Thesis, Joint Board of Theological Studies, Auckland, 1987), 146.

³⁶ James P Mason, "Church and Culture on Santa Ysabel", 21.

³⁷ Leslie Boseto, "'Your Kingdom Come': Bible Studies and Affirmations of a Melanesian Workshop," in *Living Theology in Melanesia: A Reader*, ed. John D'Arcy May, *Point Series No. 8* (Goroka: The

1.2 The 1990s

The 1990's saw a larger shift from suggestions for how to do Melanesian theology to attempts at actually doing it. The attempt to make connections between "traditional" Melanesian cultural concepts and Christianity, initiated by expatriate theologians during the 1970s and 1980s had created the foundation for work to continue in the 1990s. Significant expatriate contributions to Melanesian theology, in this period, include Mantovani's work on initiating dialogue between Christianity and existing Melanesian cultural concepts in areas such as attitudes towards ancestors, Melanesian ethics, marriage, and Melanesian concepts of magic.³⁸ In 1999, Mantovani was calling for dialogue between Christianity and Melanesian religions that are a search for the maintenance and celebration of life. This resonated with what Tuza and Kadiba had been implying in the 1980's, the possibility of a uniquely Melanesian theology.³⁹

Mantovani's identification of "life" as central to Melanesian religions resonates with his stress on community, relationships and exchange as key concepts in Melanesian cultures and much of the literature seems to reflect this.

Other writers who have identified similar concepts include Gibbs examining the importance of blood and life in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea, Fugmann in the context of salvation in Melanesian religions and Ahren's examination of Melanesian healing and wholeness.⁴⁰ All three of these authors are expatriate, one Catholic and two Lutherans who all seem to have a positive attitude towards Melanesian cultures. Yet, such an attitude is shaped by the theological denominations of the writers which represent two quite distinct theological positions. For example while Gibbs is obviously influenced by post Vatican II Catholicism and the presence of God's revelation in

Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1985), 106; Apea, "Footprints of God in Ialibu," 216-255.

³⁸ Mantovani, "Ancestors in Melanesia," 21-40; Mantovani, "Christian Dialogue with Melanesian Values and Ethics," 97-105; Ennio Mantovani, "Towards an Ecumenical Theology of Marriage in Melanesia," *Catalyst: Social Pastoral Journal for Melanesia* 23, no. 1 (1993): 6-16; Ennio Mantovani, "Is Magic Excluded from Dialogue? Missiological Reflections on Magic," *Catalyst: Social Pastoral Journal for Melanesia* 27, no. 2 (1997): 134-146.

³⁹ Mantovani, "Key Issues of a Dialogue between Christianity and Culture in Melanesia."

⁴⁰ Phillip Gibbs, "Blood and Life in a Melanesian Context," in *Christ in Melanesia, Point Series* (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1977), 166-177; Fugmann, "Salvation in Melanesian Religions," 279-296; Theodor Ahrens, "Melanesian Healing and Wholeness," in *Grace and Reciprocity: Missiological Studies*, ed. Theodor Ahrens, *Point Series No. 26* (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 2002), 132-141.

culture, both Lutheran authors choose “salvation” as a key concept in Melanesian cultures and seek to explore how that “salvation” operates. This is perhaps no surprise when salvation, and more specifically justification through faith alone, is one of the core beliefs of Lutheranism. Lutheran theology allows for a dialogue with, and to some extent a positive understanding of, non-Christian beliefs. So Fugmann is able to argue that Melanesian concepts of salvation here and now are “shared by the biblical message of new life reconciled with God.... in which the Christian witness to the new creation expresses itself in his responsible love for justice and good order within society”.⁴¹ He is able to do this precisely because Lutheran theology allows for recognition of human law that creates order. This recognition of law allows Lutherans to build bridges between Christian and non-Christian religious systems to reveal their joint efforts to create order in the world and their common search for fulfilment, while also pointing out the human inability to appease God through good works or correct ritual. While recognizing the common search for order in both religious systems, Lutheran theology still points to some kind of interventionism. Fugmann can point out what is positive in Melanesian concepts of salvation while also maintaining that no correct ritual, relationship or reciprocal exchange can lead to salvation.⁴²

The point here is that while both the Catholic and Lutheran theologians here have a relatively positive view of culture, when refined further they are still views shaped by two quite different theological positions. They are expatriate theologians working from Melanesian cultural concepts as a way into doing Melanesian theology but the theologies they develop, are qualified by the denominations from which they come.

Other expatriates use the examples of payback and compensation to illustrate their fundamental inter-connectedness to community, relationships and reciprocal exchange, but again these writers come from different contexts with different agendas. Trompf, for example, is not concerned so much with developing a theology in Melanesia, rather his work is a critical study of Melanesian religions from the perspective of Religious

⁴¹ Fugmann, "Salvation in Melanesian Religions," 292.

⁴² Ibid; Gernot Fugmann, "Salvation Expressed in a Melanesian Context," in *Christ in Melanesia, Point Series* (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1977), 122-133; Eric W Gritsch and Robert W Jenson, *Lutheranism: The Theological Movement and Its Confessional Writings* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976); Eric W Gritsch, *Fortress Introduction to Lutheranism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994); Eric W Gritsch, "Lutheranism," in *Encyclopedia Of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005).

Studies.⁴³ Lively, on the other hand, is far more explicit in his attempt to develop a model of Christian discipleship based on the payback system.⁴⁴ Lively's article is interesting because he identifies power as a key concept in Melanesia that Melanesian theology must deal with, and that Christianity must be relational to be understood in a Melanesian context.

The work of sympathetic expatriates clearly had an impact on encouraging Melanesians to write Melanesian theology for themselves. Significant examples include Namunu's examination of the interaction between Melanesian religious experience and Christian worship, Papa's examination of the Sacrament of Reconciliation among the Catholic Melpa of Papua New Guinea, and Orowae's stress on the universality of God's salvation and the importance of inculturation for Melanesians to respond to it.⁴⁵ For Orowae it is the resurrection which enables Christ to transcend physical limitations of life, time, space and culture to become Melanesian and, in response to Gaqurae, to be proclaimed as the Melanesian Christ.⁴⁶ It is noticeable that all three of these authors use and refer to the work of prominent expatriate writers such as Mantovani, Gibbs, and Whiteman.

Other Melanesian theologians work from the concept of community, including Papa and Boseto, who link the communal nature of God with the communal ethos of Melanesian life. Boseto outlines a theology of interdependence, which involves mutual dependence on people and environment, and a theology of work, which explores the Melanesian understanding of work as creativity.⁴⁷ Melanesians exist and interact with each other through a mutual dependence on each other and in dynamic relationship with each other. This is expressed under what he calls a theology of work, where working in the village setting, for example, is not about seeking financial security but rather security in people.⁴⁸ Work here is about a sense of belonging and contributing to the collective

⁴³ He does however ask the question what Melanesian theology might look like and suggests issues with which it may have to deal. See Trompf, *Melanesian Religion*, 260-273.

⁴⁴ See Lively, "Understanding God in the Payback System: A Model for Christian Discipleship," 54-68.

⁴⁵ See Simeon Namunu, "Christian Worship and Melanesian Vision of the Cosmos," *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 12, no. 1 (1996): 36-55; Papa, "The Sacrament of Reconciliation in Melpa," 46-54; Orowae, "A Universal Approach to Melanesian Theology," 77-103.

⁴⁶ Orowae, "A Universal Approach to Melanesian Theology," 93-94.

⁴⁷ Clement Papa, "The Sacrament of Reconciliation in Melpa," 46-54; Leslie Boseto, "God as Community-God in Melanesian Theology," *Pacific Journal of Theology* 2, no. 10 (1993): 41-48.

⁴⁸ This view is also expressed briefly in another of his works. See Leslie Boseto, "People Are Security: Fifth International Consultation of United and Uniting Churches, Potsdam, 1987," in *The Ecumenical*

identity of the people and the village. The communal identity of Melanesians is crucial to understanding Melanesian life and worldviews and any development of Melanesian theology must take account of this.

Tabé, a United Church Minister from the Kiribati community living in Solomon Islands, also recognizes communal ethos, focusing on the importance of giving in traditional Roviana society in the Western Solomon Islands. He writes that the giving of a gift is all about the opening up of relationship, and the receiving of a gift is a reminder of a relationship and an obligation to respond to the giver. In this sense giving is not a one-way act causing someone to have, but rather it is dynamic and conveys messages about the relationship between the giver and the receiver.⁴⁹ For Tabé, the concept of Christian stewardship must be presented in this context. The relationship between church and people should therefore be part of a reciprocal relationship that the church initiates. Effectively church and the theology, which may develop from it, has to recognize that Melanesian societies are communal, relational and reciprocal, and it is these interactive concepts that provide a foundation from which Melanesian theology could develop further.

Such Melanesian theologians have been able to use the insights of expatriate theologians while also being among the first to be doing Melanesian theology from a Melanesian perspective. Such work represents attempts to create dialogue between Melanesian cultural concepts and the Christian theologies received into Melanesia, with a view to developing a unique Melanesian contribution to those theologies.

1.3 2000 and Beyond

A distinctly Melanesian contribution to Christian theology is a theme present in much of this more recent period and has been supported by the continuing work of the Melanesian Institute and the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools in facilitating contextual theology conferences across the Pacific region. There have also been significant expatriate contributions exploring the implications of a dialogue

Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices, ed. Michael Kinnamon and Brian E Cope (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), 454-455.

⁴⁹ Burabeti Tabé, "Stewardship and Giving in the Western Solomon Islands," *Pacific Journal of Theology*, no. 23 (2000): 63-67.

between Melanesian religions and Christianity within which both are able to enrich and challenge each other.⁵⁰ Another issue for expatriate writers in the process of doing Melanesian theology is the coming to terms with their changing roles from initiators or instigators to supporters and encouragers of Melanesians doing local theology, a good example being Gibbs's analysis of the changing roles of missionaries in Melanesia.⁵¹

Melanesian theologians are also engaged in a process of analysing the role of missionaries in the coming and development of Christianity in Melanesia. One prominent example is Paroi, a Catholic Priest from Solomon Islands, who is largely critical of what he sees as the imposition of "Western" Civilisation onto Melanesia by missionaries, and he has not only critiqued various models of missionary activity in Melanesia but suggests the need for a decolonising theology. This means enabling Melanesians to talk about God based on their experience of being Melanesian while recognizing that God speaks to them as Melanesians and not Europeans. Paroi's contribution to this process is a Melanesian theology of land that encompasses the totality of Melanesian life and experience.⁵² The implication of Paroi's argument is that a uniquely Melanesian experience of God enables Melanesian theologians to envisage models of God and his interaction in the world in terms that are quite different from inherited European theological traditions. Certainly expatriate writers such as Gibbs and May are implying similar views, while Mantovani's developing of dialogue between Christianity and the Dema myths of Papua New Guinea would also seem to point to similar conclusions.⁵³

Other Melanesian writers hinting at similar ideas are Daimoi pointing out significant differences between how Melanesians and "Westerners" interpret the world. Westerners, he claims, are analytical in their thought processes, dividing life into

⁵⁰ Mantovani's work on the Dema story being a significant example. See for example Ennio Mantovani, *Divine Revelation and the Religions of PNG: A Missiological Manual* (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 2000), 75-82; Rowsome, "Melanesian Traditional Religion," 45-53; Phillip Gibbs, "'It's in the Blood': Dialogue with Primal Religion in Papua New Guinea," *Catalyst: Social Pastoral Journal for Melanesia* 34, no. 2 (2004): 137-138; Phillip Gibbs, "Missionaries and Culture," *Catalyst: Social Pastoral Journal for Melanesia* 31, no. 1 (2001): 9,17.

⁵¹ Gibbs, "Missionaries and Culture," 5-6.

⁵² See Henry Paroi, "Decolonizing Theology," *Ibid.*: 19-38; Henry Paroi, "Theoretical Models of Missionary Activity of the Church and a Need for Contextualisation," *Catalyst: Social Pastoral Journal for Melanesia* 34, no. 2 (2004): 108-128.

⁵³ Refer to works by Mantovani and Gibbs referenced on the previous page. See also May, *Transcendence and Violence: The Encounter of Buddhist, Christian and Primal Traditions*. Particularly Chapter 2: *Initiation Into The Future: Christianity and Modernity in Melanesia*.

segments and units. Melanesians on the other hand think synthetically, seeing life as interrelated, interdependent and as a complete totality. His claim that “Western” thought patterns are contributing to a fragmentation of Melanesian thought patterns, and his call for missionaries to think like Melanesians, would seem to promote a distinctly Melanesian understanding of God as and against the “Western” versions that have been inherited.⁵⁴ Ofasia a South Sea Evangelical Church Pastor from Malaita, argues that missionaries rejected the To’abaitan culture they encountered and replaced it with their own. The result was a loss of important cultural values such as the process of forgiveness and reconciliation that were “hooks” on which the Gospel could hang.⁵⁵ Ofasia claims that, “The Toabaitan people did not have any problem in understanding the message of God’s forgiveness and reconciliation, but they had a problem of accepting that message of reconciliation outside the cultural values of To’abaitan culture”.⁵⁶ His recommendation for the SSEC to appreciate the importance of cultural values and review the negative attitudes towards them suggests a call to understand God through To’abaitan cultural values and experience.⁵⁷

The expatriate, Prior, has edited a number of works from both local theologians from Vanuatu and expatriate theologians working there. The articles written mostly by Presbyterian and Anglican theological students and the lecturers teaching them, are important attempts to interpret Christ through Vanuatu cultural traditions. Examples include *Christ our Saviour as Chief*, *The Yam as a Symbol for Jesus*, *Jesus Our Uncle*, *Jesus and the Dolphin*, *Jesus Christ and Pig-killing* and so on. Many of these articles also call for an understanding of Christianity in distinctly Melanesian terms. Ure, for example, asks the question: has Christ been identified with Melanesia or is belief in him still in pre-formulated “Western” ideas?⁵⁸ Olivier on the other hand identifies apology and inculturation as essential concepts for mission in contemporary Vanuatu. Apology because he claims that the early missionaries denied the existence of indigenous cultures and introduced a “Western” concept of Christ, and inculturation as the Gospel

⁵⁴ Joshua Daimoi, "Understanding Melanesians," *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 17, no. 2 (2001): 10-11.

⁵⁵ James Ofasia, "Traditional Toabaitan Methods of Forgiveness and Reconciliation," 29.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

⁵⁸ Stanley Ure, "Christ Our Saviour as Chief," in *Gospel and Culture 4: Local Voices on Jesus Christ and Mission*, ed. Randall Prior (Wattle Park, Australia: Gospel Vanuatu Books, 2005), 18.

integrates with Vanuatu culture to create a ni-Vanuatu understanding and interpretation of Christ.⁵⁹

Tanihi, when examining traditional forms of sacrifice on North Pentecost in Vanuatu, remarks that European missionaries largely dismissed the existing sacrificial belief system as superstition. Yet the coming of Christianity did not destroy that system, rather the death of Christ as a perfect sacrifice adds a new meaning to it.⁶⁰ Other examples include Yamsiu and Namel's use of dolphins as a symbol to reflect Christ particularly in their own cultures which regard them as protectors of the sea. Both point to how examples of dolphins accompanying, protecting and guiding human beings are displays of Christlike behaviour.⁶¹ Yamsiu suggests that the symbol of Christ as dolphin is a much more appropriate symbol for her own Melanesian context.⁶²

Over the last four decades, Melanesian theology has emerged as a theology in development and in a process of becoming. Its development from being largely an expatriate innovation into theology written by Melanesians dialoguing with their own cultural traditions and interpreting Christ through them represents theology that is steadily evolving and developing. It has evolved from theologians talking about Melanesian theology to actually doing it. The expatriate instigators of that theology find their role in this process inevitably changes from instigators, to supporters of local theologians writing for themselves and their own cultural traditions. Perhaps the clearest example of this development is seen in Gaqurae's call in the 1970s for a Melanesian Christ, a call being taken up by Melanesians illustrated in Prior's collection who are articulating what Christ means for them in the thought forms and symbols of their own cultural traditions.

⁵⁹ Noclam Olivier, "A Concept of Mission in Vanuatu" *Ibid.*, 78-82.

⁶⁰ Emmanuel Tanihi, "Sacrifice in North Pentecost: Relating the Gospel to Traditional Melanesian Belief," in *Gospel and Culture in Vanuatu 5: Women in Culture and Church and Other Issues*, ed. Randall Prior (Wattle Park, Australia: Gospel Vanuatu Books, 2006), 184-185.

⁶¹ Sheila Yamsiu, "Dolphins Reflecting Jesus Christ," in *Gospel and Culture in Vanuatu 4: Local Voices on Jesus Christ and Mission*, ed. Randall Prior (Wattle Park, Australia: Gospel Vanuatu Books, 2005), 53-55; Martin Namel, "Jesus and the Dolphin," in *Gospel and Culture 4: Local Voices on Jesus Christ and Mission*, ed. Randall Prior (Wattle Park, Australia: Gospel Vanuatu Books, 2005), 56-57.

⁶² Yamsiu, "Dolphins Reflecting Jesus Christ," 54.

2. The Role of the Expatriate in Melanesian Theology

While May points to the importance of Melanesian theology being written and developed by Melanesians themselves, much of it is still written by expatriate authors. This raises considerable questions about the authenticity of such theology. The contribution of expatriates may be significant to the development of Melanesian theology but what is the nature of that contribution? Is there a significant difference between how expatriates and Melanesians interpret the issues, and how much confidence can be placed in an expatriate interpretation of the Melanesian mind? The question of how much of what is written as Melanesian theology actually reflects what Melanesians really think, is a serious one that requires careful attention.

Adams, writing in the Asian context, is very clear about his own writing and whom he thinks should be writing Asian theology. He writes, "Although written in Asia, these essays do not pretend to be Asian theology, for the writer is Western by birth and education. The task of writing Asian theology quite properly belongs to Asians, not to expatriate Americans and Europeans".⁶³

While this may be so, the incentive for genuinely indigenous theological reflection and expression in Melanesia has come predominantly from sympathetic expatriates particularly associated with the Melanesian Institute.⁶⁴ While Mantovani states that localisation is a central goal of the Institute, he is also very honest in admitting the difficulties associated with it. For example, he indicates that although the aim was to have Melanesians on the faculty and filling all the key positions of the Institute, given the academic standard needed and the specialisations required, it was not easy to find local staff.⁶⁵

Consequently, expatriates continue to take a leading role in writing and encouraging the development of Melanesian theology but what should the role of the expatriate be in

⁶³ Daniel J Adams, *Cross Cultural Theology: Western Reflections in Asia* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), v.

⁶⁴ May, "Progress and Problems of Indigenous Theology in Melanesia," x.

⁶⁵ Ennio Mantovani, "Consolidation," in *25 Years of Service the Melanesian Institute: Its History and Its Work*, ed. Ennio Mantovani, *Point Series No. 19* (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1994), 80.

this situation? The responses to this question are varied.⁶⁶ For example Trompf points out that it is out of place for an expatriate to engage in some full-blown theological enterprise, adding that the most one can do is to suggest guidelines as to how an agenda for indigenous theology might be conceived.⁶⁷

Schreiter, on the other hand, carefully distinguishes between insiders and outsiders in a culture and acknowledges that anyone who has worked cross-culturally can never know that culture intimately as one's own. However, this does not preclude the outsider from contributing to that culture and its theology.⁶⁸ Similarly the mission anthropologist, Kraft, defines insider and outsider in terms of innovator and advocate respectively. The insiders, he contends, are the innovators who are able to make changes within their own cultures. The outsiders, on the other hand, are advocates: they may advocate changes to a culture but cannot make the changes themselves. While an advocate of culture change can be both an insider and an outsider, the innovator of change can only be an insider.⁶⁹

This is also the view of the mission anthropologist Hiebert who describes missionaries as culture brokers, persons who are able to detach themselves, to some extent, from their own culture and translate beliefs and practices from one culture to another. This is possible only when missionaries learn to see, however imperfectly, through the eyes of people from the culture within which they work and only then can they become more aware of their own cultural assumptions, which may simply be taken for granted.⁷⁰

Expatriate theologians working in Melanesia such as Neuhauser, Burrows and Schwartz see expatriates as useful auxiliaries who are available when needed and who are able to step back when not.⁷¹

⁶⁶ It must also be acknowledged that many people writing on this issue, tend to be expatriates themselves and so often are justifying their own position as outsiders working in a different culture.

⁶⁷ Trompf, *Melanesian Religion*, 260.

⁶⁸ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 20. See also Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1988), 254.

⁶⁹ Charles H Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective Revised 25th Anniversary Edition*, Second ed. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2005), 281.

⁷⁰ Paul G Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 95.

⁷¹ Martin Neuhauser, "Quest for Awareness: Contemporary Issues Challenging the Ministry of the Church in Melanesia," *Point*, no. 1 (1976): 28-29; William R Burrows, "Theologising in the Melanesian Context Today," in *Christ in Melanesia, Point Series* (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1977), 252; Brian Schwarz, "Contextualization and the Church in Melanesia," in *An*

Schwartz notes that not being able to step back can become a hindrance to the contextualization process simply because the missionary's work and commitment can encourage a sense of dependency. In this case, the danger is that local churches will not shoulder their own responsibilities but rely on the work and example of outsiders.⁷² His conclusion is that missionaries should not attempt to contextualize for local churches or Christian communities because the process of contextualization is as important as the end result. As he explains, "As people struggle to work out the implications of Christ's death and resurrection for their own lives and formulate their own responses to him, understanding grows, faith is strengthened and the church matures".⁷³

Bevans, on the other hand, argues that in one sense, a non-participant in a context cannot do contextual theology because he or she does not fully share the experience of those in the context, thus non-Melanesians do not, or cannot, know what Melanesians feel or how they perceive reality.⁷⁴

Yet, if the outsider is willing to study and read about a particular culture, he or she may come to understand much of what it is about. He or she may also be able to critique and identify issues that participants in a culture do not see. The outsider may be able to identify both the positive and negative aspects of a context and point them out. Consequently, "In a limited but never complete way, the non-participant can help in developing a theology that is culturally and socially sensitive to the context by sharing his or her insights as a stranger into the culture".⁷⁵

The Australian theologian Goosen identifies three elements that he sees make up "Australian" theologies. These are:

Introduction to Ministry in Melanesia, ed. Brian Schwarz, *Point Series No.7* (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1985), 115.

⁷² Schwarz, "Contextualization and the Church in Melanesia," 114. A similar point is echoed in Roland Allen's work. See for example David Paton and Charles H Long, eds., *The Compulsion of the Spirit: A Roland Allen Reader* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 12-13; Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St Paul's or Ours?* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1968), 144,159.

⁷³ Schwarz, "Contextualization and the Church in Melanesia," 114.

⁷⁴ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Revised and Expanded Edition*, 19.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

1. they must be written in Australia;
2. they must articulate themselves in a way that shows that they have taken into consideration the culture of the people for whom they write;
3. they must use the idiom of the language of the people to whom the theology is directed.⁷⁶

If similar criteria are applied to Melanesia, then at least on one level, an expatriate can do Melanesian theology, but it will always be theology that is limited or partial and that will never adequately define or resolve the issues with which it deals. As the expatriate, Bartle, argues, missionaries can have a role to play in the theological process either as resource persons or outside catalysts, but the indigenising of theology in Melanesian cultures can only come from Melanesians themselves, those who live and belong within those cultures.⁷⁷

Young's work on conflict resolution in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea also raises ethical questions about the rights of expatriates being involved in other people's issues or conflicts. That right, he claims, can only be given by those who want to know something for their own benefit and that enables them to manage their own affairs and plan for the future that they want.⁷⁸

Similarly Mantovani seems to be torn between two distinct positions. On the one hand, when asked to write about Melanesian identity issues, he declares that, "My first reaction was that as a European I was not qualified to deal with it: I could never say what goes on in the heart or mind of a Melanesian person".⁷⁹ Yet, on reflection he sees the "validity of the exercise" based on his extensive experience of working with Melanesians.⁸⁰ At the heart of his struggle is the conviction that expatriates have a responsibility towards Melanesian cultures based on the missionary misunderstandings of those cultures of the past and the confusion they may well have caused Melanesians as a result. His conclusion is that, "It is necessary that somebody from the same group

⁷⁶ Gideon Goosen, *Australian Theologies: Themes and Methodologies into the Third Millennium* (Strathfield, New South Wales: St Pauls, 2000), 30.

⁷⁷ Bartle, *Death, Witchcraft and the Spirit World in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea*, 14-15.

⁷⁸ Douglas W Young, *Our Land Is Green and Black: Conflict Resolution in Enga*, Point Series No. 28 (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 2004), 52.

⁷⁹ Ennio Mantovani, "On Being a True Melanesian and a True Christian," *South Pacific Journal of Mission Studies*, no. 31 & 32 (2004): 15.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

undertake to present an alternative view based on a different understanding of the Melanesian value system. It might liberate the Melanesians to follow what they always felt to be right".⁸¹

Perhaps one of the most useful ways that contextual theology can be done is simply in the doing of it. Bevans notes that simply doing theology in a way that makes the most sense to the doer, can stimulate others to respond to it. Once others hear or listen to it, they may be struck by the differences in how they think. It may seem irrelevant, challenging or even offensive and when confronted by what they are not, the listeners may begin to develop responses that do express who they are and what they believe.⁸² The key here is for the outsider to be honest about their own theological position and its limitations, which may stimulate people from the culture or situation to do their own theology in response.⁸³

2.1 Insider or Outsider Status

All of these views on who can do Melanesian theology reflect the larger debate of insider and outsider status and who is in the better position to study and understand a culture. It is, as social researchers Merriam and Muhamad argue, often assumed that insiders have easier access to respondents, can ask more meaningful questions, are less likely to disrupt the social setting and can produce a more truthful and authentic understanding of the culture within which they work, simply because they belong to it and understand its intricate and intimate workings.⁸⁴

However, it can be argued that the insider can be too close to the culture under study and consequently be inherently biased. The outsider on the other hand, while not able to share the intimacy of the insider in understanding the subtleties of a particular culture and consequently finding it more difficult to understand and interpret, does have an advantage by being unfamiliar with it. The outsider is unfamiliar with the culture under study and therefore asks critical questions that may be too obvious for the insider to ask.

⁸¹ Mantovani, "Traditional and Present Day Melanesian Values and Ethics," 65; Peter Schineller, *A Handbook on Inculturation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 12.

⁸² Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Revised and Expanded Edition*, 20.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Sharan B Merriam and Mazanah Muhamad, "Insider/Outsider Status: Reflections on Cross-Cultural Interviewing," *Inquiry: Critical Thinking Across The Disciplines*: 35.

He or she is also non-aligned with any cultural groups or sub-groups and therefore freer to ask culturally sensitive or *tabu* questions. It may also be that members of the culture under study are freer to discuss and even confess sensitive issues much more readily to the outsider than to an insider of that cultural group.⁸⁵

Questions continue to rage over which group is the more objective or biased, but the issue is far more complex than that. The sociologist, Merton, notes that the insider/outsider status is not necessarily fixed. All can be insiders or outsiders depending on the various social situations and contexts in which they find themselves. Various social statuses and group and relationship affiliations all interact and determine our insider/outsider status in the eyes of a particular group.⁸⁶ These categories cannot be hard and fast. An expatriate working in Melanesia for example, like myself, may be an outsider, but due to marriage and blood ties to a Melanesian family may also be, to some degree, an insider. I may be an insider to family members, yet an outsider to other groups. An expatriate such as Richard Carter may be an outsider in relation to Melanesian culture yet, by virtue of being Chaplain to the Melanesian Brotherhood and later a Brother himself, has an insider's knowledge of the Community and the social and cultural issues it has to face. He can be both an insider and an outsider at the same time.

Another example may be the missionary anthropologist and expatriate, Charles Fox who, like Carter, joined the Melanesian Brotherhood. He also exchanged names with a Melanesian friend and family as a symbol of their close relationship and kinship. Here status becomes somewhat ambiguous and fluid and the distinction between Melanesian and expatriate may not necessarily always reflect fixed categories of insider and outsider respectively.

Although the insider/outsider analysis is useful in the discussion of Melanesian theology, we need to move towards a further stage beyond the insider/outsider analysis as an exclusive proposition. Identity and social location shape and define all theologians regardless of whether they are expatriates or Melanesians. Anyone can do theology, but they do it from a particular social location defined by such factors as culture, gender,

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ See R K Merton, "Insiders and Outsiders: A Chapter in the Sociology of Knowledge," *American Journal of Sociology* 78, no. 1 (1978): 9-47.

age, and socio-economic position. This will often enable the theologian to contribute to a larger theological discussion but all theology will be limited as the social location will contribute to, or create limits for, that theological discussion.

Theologians establish their identity or have it established for them, by drawing on a number of identities and experiences open to them. Belonging or identifying is not simply a matter of being an insider or outsider, but rather the differing intensity of different kinds of belonging and experience. For example, expatriate theologians living and working in Melanesia will be shaped by their experiences which in turn shape their own sense of identity, belonging, and how they do theology. An expatriate's experience of Melanesia will not be as intense as that of a Melanesian brought up there, but it is not zero either: it is still an experience of cultures and events that determine theological reflection. Expatriates should not be excluded from participating in Melanesian theology because their experience of Melanesia is a valid experience for the theological process of doing theology in Melanesia, primarily because it may be a different experience and interpretation of events.

Crucially, however, the question is whether expatriate theologians are aware, not only of their own social location and context and how that impacts on the theology they write, but also their own sense of belonging and identity and how that interacts with their experiences of being in Melanesia. Are they aware of the limits of their own theology or do they assume their own superior ability to interpret Melanesian culture and theology? This is a crucial question when assessing the expatriate contribution to Melanesian theology and particularly when some expatriates, with colonial connections in particular, have, over the past few centuries, often produced distorted and arrogant versions of what was good for Pacific Islanders, or have taught as universal truth what was in fact a particular local theology that they brought with them from their own country of origin.

There is also the question of multiculturalism among Melanesians themselves. Island cultures from within Melanesia also interact and integrate with each other, particularly through marriage and migration for example. This, in an incredibly diverse cultural and social context, leads to an interaction between cultures and traditions. Melanesians writing Melanesian theology are also influenced by, and interacting with, various other

Melanesian contexts and cultures they have encountered, so that the experiences and location of the Melanesian will determine the kind of theology that he or she writes as much as the expatriate.

The question of whether an expatriate can do Melanesian theology or, at least, on what level he or she contributes, is a question which also has some bearing on Melanesians. In what way, for example, can a Malaitan write about theology on Guadalcanal, or a person from Santa Isabel engage in theological reflection on Santa Cruz?

When, for example, a Malaitan does theology on Guadalcanal the theology will be shaped by the experience of being Malaitan and the interaction and encounter with Guadalcanal culture, people or context. The experience will shape the theology. More complex still is the interaction of the Melanesian theologian, not only with diverse Melanesian cultures, but also with various cultures, traditions and theologies coming in from outside as the result of multiculturalism and globalisation.

In addition, many such Melanesian theologians have had a significant period of study overseas. This encounter with “Western” forms of education or theological traditions overseas will influence their own theology and determine the theological methodology that they employ in doing Melanesian theology.

The theological debate between insider and outsider is often not adequate to deal with the various nuances that shape the kind of theology being done in the Melanesian context and, I suspect, elsewhere. The various strands of belonging, experience and identity that theologians employ cannot be so easily categorised into manageable boxes that determine who does what kind of theology. These various strands become contributors to theology yet also create limitations on that same theology. The situation is complex, but key here are theologians being able to recognize the impact of their own sense of belonging and experience on their theology and being able to recognize, too, the limitations and weaknesses of that theology.

3. *Melanesian Theologies, Theological Contexts and Contextual Theologians: Some Difficulties*

My overview of Melanesian theology raises a number of difficulties that need further discussion. The claim by some Melanesian theologians and expatriates doing theology in Melanesia that missionaries misunderstood, devalued or even destroyed the Melanesian cultures they encountered, or the claim that Melanesian theology is the search for alternatives to the dominant “European” models or traditions that inhibit genuine Melanesian theological reflection, may have truth in them but are ultimately problematic.

The coming of Christianity to Melanesia meant the introduction of a number of Christian denominations all with their own theological positions and opinions on what they were trying to do and on how to deal with the cultures and worldviews they encountered. Christianity in Melanesia, therefore, and the missionaries who brought it, are not identical from region to region. Rather there is considerable diversity of missionary attitudes, strategies, theologies and levels of interaction across cultures and denominations.

For example while there may have been some missionaries who misunderstood or even condemned the cultural practices they saw, there were equally others who made serious attempts to understand and respect them.⁸⁷ The Melanesian Mission in Solomon Islands, for example, made serious attempts to adapt Christianity to the cultural practices they saw and worked with. The historian Hilliard writes about how Bishop Patteson, the first Bishop of Melanesia, was preoccupied with the question of adapting Christian doctrines and practices shaped by a particular culture, to the very different Melanesian cultural traditions and worldviews and he worked from the premise “that missionaries should as far as possible build on existing beliefs”.⁸⁸ Consequently, it is misleading to assume that all missionaries were the same because they were the

⁸⁷ Gibbs comments that it is common in Enga, Papua New Guinea to hear people saying that missionaries condemned the cultural initiation rites that they witnessed, but the reality was that at one such rite they actively took part in them, while another missionary is quoted as saying: “Especially I wanted them to discover the very human and Christian values in their own culture, and to show how much can be integrated and how well the traditional and Christian cultures could enrich each other”. See Gibbs, “Missionaries and Culture,” 12-13.

⁸⁸ Hilliard, “The God of the Melanesian Mission,” 197-199.

products of quite different theological denominations and traditions and shaped by different European contexts.

Those doing or writing about theology in contemporary Melanesia are, in a sense no different, in that all are influenced and shaped by their views and their experiences of various theological contexts, Christian denominations and social locations. Yet, to make matters more complicated still, there are further categories at work within the Christian denominations themselves. The terms “evangelical,” “liberal,” and “charismatic” are examples of theological positions within various Christian denominations. The Melanesian Mission, for example, was from the Anglo-Catholic strand of Anglicanism and that determined the form of Christianity, Christian ritual and worship that their missionaries introduced.

The introduction of Christianity to Melanesia also created complex levels of interaction between missionary and Melanesian and often the Melanesian response to that Christianity was a dynamic one. Rather than Melanesians being victims of a foreign religious conquest, they were often interacting with and realigning their own cultural systems in response to the new religion. The arrival of Christianity in the Anglican context of Solomon Islands, for example, was not an imposition or forced conversion. Melanesians themselves wanted access to the new God and, as I have argued elsewhere, access to the mana that God provided.⁸⁹ The historian, Davidson, argues that often Melanesians have been the agents of their own conversion and the changes which have taken place within their own societies. Often it was and is the Melanesians who control the pace and extent of that transformation and not the foreign missionary.⁹⁰ Not only is there a diversity of Christian denominations and missionary attitudes across Melanesia but also complex levels of interaction with the Melanesians who receive them.

This interaction ensured that when Christianity was accepted into Melanesia, it underwent a process of shaping and reshaping to have meaning in that context. The way, for example, that mana operates in the Christian context, explored in previous chapters, is an example of how two very different cultural and religious contexts

⁸⁹ Theodor Ahrens, "The Promise of New Life: Some Remarks on the Dynamics of Christianity in Oceania," *Catalyst: Social Pastoral Journal for Melanesia* 25, no. 2 (1995): 189.

⁹⁰ Davidson, "Christianity in Melanesia: Some Historical and Missiological Reflections," 40-41.

interact and shape each other. Consequently, regardless of the introduction of “foreign” theologies or “European” forms of Christianity, Christianity in Melanesia will have a distinctly Melanesian flavour, which implies that rather than Melanesians being alienated from their own cultures, they were and are involved in a continuing process of shaping that Christianity to be relevant to their daily lives and experience. This is a continuous process as various Christian denominations and Melanesian worldviews interact in a theological synthesis which ensures that the type of Christianity that develops and the “Melanesian” theology that emerges is shaped by various European and Melanesian contexts, making it more than “European” theology or “Melanesian” theology but rather elements of both.

When the Gospel is introduced into Melanesia it involves a process of Melanesians accepting and interpreting it through their own worldviews and life experience. Yet the “Gospel” they accept is not some kind of pure ideal untouched by any form of culture but rather the product of various cultural traditions and contexts that have interacted with each other over centuries. The introduction of the Gospel to Europe, for example, was also the introduction of a Gospel shaped by one context and applied into another.

In one sense, the issues that Melanesian theologians are getting to grips with are not new: they are the consequences of any inter-contextual and cultural interaction between an introduced Gospel and the existing context and worldview. The only difference is that Melanesians have not had the luxury of those centuries to interact with the Gospel in their own way. The process here is much more rapid and accelerated. Those involved in Melanesian theology should not think that somehow this interaction is unique to Melanesia. In the case of expatriates, this process has already gone on, and is going on, within their own cultural contexts and they are the products of that interaction themselves.

All of this raises questions about what Melanesian theology actually is. Is it an indigenous Melanesian response to the Gospel or purely a construct created by expatriate theologians? If much of it is written or determined by expatriates, then how far are the tools, methodologies and agendas set by expatriates and the various theological positions that they come from? Even when Melanesians do theology themselves, how far are they still following the models of theological reflection introduced and set from outside?

It seems to me that because the coming of Christianity to Melanesia is relatively recent, Melanesians do not have their own tools or methodology or at least have not had the time to develop them for constructing their own theology. This, it seems, is one of the tasks of Melanesian theology, to reflect on and construct a methodology that enables Melanesians to do theology for themselves and the Melanesian context. However, if Melanesian theology is an expatriate construct how possible is it for this task to be achieved? The tension between the popular religion of Melanesians and the official religion of the churches that both May and Kadiba identify, seems to lend support to the questioning of Melanesian theology and how far it actually represents the views of Melanesians themselves. This makes it all the more critical for expatriates doing theology in Melanesia to be not only aware of their own theological context and limitations but to declare them and to be aware just how far their own methodologies and tools for constructing theology developed in one context are determining the theological agenda in another. It may also lend more weight to the arguments of those who construct theology from Melanesian cultures as a primary source for theology and as a source of God's revelation through them. Melanesian theology, it seems, needs more than ever to begin from the cultural perspective of Melanesians and to do theology from Melanesia, from where Melanesians actually are.

4. *Mana*

Following the overview and identification of some emerging issues in Melanesian theology, I now turn to the issue that concerns us the most, namely: the question of mana and its theological treatment.

Tippett is one of the first authors to study the mana concept from a theological perspective and his argument that Christianity was interpreted and accepted as a new form of mana is one shared by a number of other writers, both expatriate and Melanesian. The expatriate Whiteman and Melanesian authors Mason, Hagesi, Siru, Boe and Kelaepa all seem to be in broad agreement that mana was a significant factor in the conversion of Melanesians to Christianity.⁹¹ It is noticeable, however, that almost

⁹¹ See Tippett, *Solomon Islands Christianity: A Study in Growth and Obstruction*, 100-118; Hagesi, "Towards Localization of Anglican Worship in the Solomon Islands"; Mason, "Church and Culture on Santa Ysabel", 64, 110; George Siru, "The Prophet of Malaita, Solomon Islands" (BD Thesis, Pacific Theological College, Suva, 1986); Boe, "The Missionaries and Their Gospel- the Melanesians and Their

all of them are writing about the Anglican Church in Solomon Islands, as is Tippett. Therefore, they are writing about the interaction between a specific Christian denomination and specific Melanesian cultures, and a denomination that had a largely positive view of those cultures.

This is important because Ahrens, writing in Papua New Guinea, seems to broadly agree with the writers above by stating that the main religious question in Melanesia is how to gain access to power and how to control it to make life successful. He uses Tippett's terminology of "power encounter" existing between the two very different European and Melanesian worldviews, claiming that this encounter was ultimately interpreted by Melanesians in religious terms leading to them actively seeking power in the new Christian context.⁹² He concludes by arguing that, "Often people did see in Christianity just another form of traditional religion, or rather they ascribed the same function to Christianity as they had to traditional religion".⁹³ Christianity became simply another, albeit more effective, way of gaining access to power and consequently Christian concepts are interpreted and reinterpreted through the lens of Melanesian worldviews.⁹⁴

While we can note the similarities between Tippett's interpretation with that of Ahrens, the cultural and denominational differences between Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea make any direct comparison difficult. Ahrens is not only writing out of Papua New Guinea, but also as a Lutheran pastor is addressing Lutheran Christianity in a Melanesian context. He is, therefore, addressing the concerns of that particular context and the form of Christianity that has developed there.

The views of expatriates such as Tippett and Ahrens are important but they remain expatriate interpretations across diverse Melanesian regions and cultures and rely on the experiences, context and worldviews of the interpreter, who sees "Melanesia" through his or her own interpretative framework. Consequently, such views are not absolute

Response," 136-137; Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 141-142.

⁹² See also Swain and Trompf, eds., *The Religions of Oceania*, 209.

⁹³ Theodor Ahrens, "Local Church and Theology in Melanesia," *Point*, no. 2 (1978): 145.

⁹⁴ Michael Aike, "Reflections on Culture, Ancestors and Worship in the Solomon Islands," in *Melanesian Culture and Christian Faith*, ed. Cliff Wright (Honiara: Solomon Islands Christian Association, 1978), 44.

authorities on events but rather culturally relative interpretations open to question. Tippett's interpretation of mana is questioned by anthropologists such as Burt based on his own interpretations of Kwara'ae culture.⁹⁵ The difficulty here is that not only is there considerable variation of how mana operates across Melanesia, but also in how and what expatriate commentators interpret. Burt may question Tippett but his own interpretation of the Kwara'ae is just as culturally relative and equally open to scrutiny.

Regardless of the differences of interpretation, many theologians and anthropologists recognize that mana is interconnected with other key Melanesian concepts and forms part of the integrated Melanesian life and experience. To deal with mana theologically is to try to understand its place in Melanesian worldviews and how it interacts with Christianity. If expatriates are involved in this process then we are dependent on their particular interpretation of "Melanesia" from their own denominational and cultural viewpoint. This is not bad in itself, but any failure to realize the theological limitations of context, and the temptation to assume that expatriates must be absolute authorities, can lead to the "Melanesian worldview" being a construct or distortion invented by those same expatriates.

4.1 Mana and Christianity: Some Expatriate Interpretations

Many expatriate theologians have noted how "traditional" Melanesian concepts are operating in the new Christian context. This largely revolves around the interpretation of "sin" in a Melanesian context as being the breaking of relationships with gods, ancestral spirits, other people, and the environment. Sickness, misfortune and death are the visible signs of a broken relationship to such an extent that, according to May, "concepts such as 'accident' or 'objective cause' play very subordinate roles in the Melanesian view of the world. When sickness or misfortune occurs the question is not 'what was the cause?' but 'who was the cause?'"⁹⁶

Hogbin has already shown how this interacts with local forms of Christianity among the Koaka speakers of Guadalcanal.⁹⁷ In this context, Hogbin claims that "sin" is the

⁹⁵ Burt, *Tradition & Christianity: The Colonial Transformation of a Solomon Islands Society*, 54.

⁹⁶ May, *Transcendence and Violence: The Encounter of Buddhist, Christian and Primal Traditions*, 48.

⁹⁷ As noted in chapter 2.

breaking of relationships to God, and sickness, death and misfortune are the visible signs of this. The relationship is only restored by confession and forgiveness of sins.⁹⁸ This would seem to have important implications for Melanesian Christianity. Horndasch for example, claims that as suffering is the “proof” of a broken relationship and the result of sin, it is therefore bad and to be avoided. The issue, for Horndasch, is the difficulty of reconciling such a view with the incarnation, suffering and death of Christ on the cross. If well-being is the proof of a faithful relationship to God and suffering the result of a broken relationship, then why does Christ suffer and die?

Furthermore, Lively contends that there are various misconceptions preventing Melanesians from understanding Christianity. This, he explains, stems from the fact that concepts of a loving, forgiving God who desires relationship to us are foreign concepts to Melanesians. Following Whiteman, he refers to the various creator gods present in many Melanesian cultures and how they do not preside over the other spirits but have instead withdrawn from active involvement in the world.⁹⁹ Neuhauser contends that such creator gods or supreme beings remain vague, largely inefficient and ineffective, so that when the Christian God is identified with terms such as Creator and Supreme Being he is largely viewed as being irrelevant to daily life.¹⁰⁰ Bartle argues similarly that while the Christian God is viewed as powerful, it is the ghosts and ancestral spirits that are more immediately relevant and effective in daily life. He continues:

Any theology which ignores the traditional cosmology will result in a truncated gospel. Such a truncated gospel gives the impression that although Jesus can help with the ultimate issues (such as eternal salvation), he is powerless to deal with the daily fear of sorcery and witchcraft.¹⁰¹

These are all comments from expatriate writers working in various parts of Papua New Guinea and while there may be truth in them, it is difficult to generalize in such a way as to say that Melanesians think of God in the same way. For example, Mantovani’s work on the Dema myths would seem to suggest that concepts of life-giving sacrifice or

⁹⁸ A similar situation can be found in Papa’s examination of reconciliation among the Melpa of Papua New Guinea.

⁹⁹ Lively, "Understanding God in the Payback System: A Model for Christian Discipleship," 59; Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 71-72; Rowsome, "Melanesian Traditional Religion," 41.

¹⁰⁰ Neuhauser, "Quest for Awareness: Contemporary Issues Challenging the Ministry of the Church in Melanesia," 34.

¹⁰¹ Bartle, *Death, Witchcraft and the Spirit World in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea*, 44.

new life emerging from death do exist in Melanesian myth and culture stories which may challenge Horndasch's assumptions. Furthermore, the claim that it is hard for Melanesians to understand the concept of Christ on the cross, is making very large assumptions about the Melanesian mind. Although there may be tensions between Christ's suffering on the cross, and well-being in Melanesian worldviews being a sign of faithful relationship to God, it does not follow that Melanesians are somehow incapable of understanding Christ outside the terms of their own worldview. Melanesians presumably are just as capable as any other culture or ethnic group of learning about and wanting to follow a foreign Christ. Any acceptance of Christianity in Melanesia does involve, in varying degrees, some acceptance of a foreign Christ coming in from outside and how that interacts with the Melanesian cultures it encounters. Christianity has to be received from outside in order to engage with Melanesian concepts inside.

In addition, the differentiation that Melanesians are supposed to make between the relevance of the Christian God and that of the existing ghosts and ancestral spirits is simplistic. The coming of Anglican Christianity to Solomon Islands, for example, has resulted largely in God both supplementing and replacing traditional ancestral spirits. Supplementing, in the sense that belief in Christianity has meant a shift in allegiance to God but this does not deny the existence of other spirits still operating and interacting with the Melanesian; and replacing, in the sense that the acceptance of the Christian God also leads to God taking on the role of those spirits. Mana in the Christian context often operates in a similar way as it did before Christianity was accepted, the essential difference being that God is now the source of that mana. However, this does not stop people wanting to possess, use or manipulate mana for their own personal well-being or benefit.

4.2 Salvation by Works vs Salvation by Faith: More Expatriate Interpretations

The Melanesian concepts of "fullness of life", the importance of maintaining relationships, and sin as the breaking of such relationships, lead to a situation where one receives fullness of life as the result of one's actions in maintaining relationships. Ahrens describes sickness and other types of misfortune as the absence of "salvation",

the result of spirits withdrawing their blessings.¹⁰² Numerous expatriate writers argue that this principle continues to operate in the Melanesian Christian context, in that some Melanesians came to see God as operating in a system of reward and punishment. A person is blessed if his or her relationship to God is maintained. Sin, on the other hand, is the breaking of relationships which leads to punishment.¹⁰³ The implication is that God is open to influence and coercion and, according to Fugmann, is “principally retributive, reacting according to a fairly predesigned pattern of reward or punishment”.¹⁰⁴

May implies that relationships in this context are the means to an end to “receive” salvation and, in a similar way, Fugmann claims that confession of sin and reconciliation with God may well be not so much about feeling guilty or showing repentance, but more about restoring relationships to avoid God’s punishment.¹⁰⁵ If God is open to influence, then the divine can be convinced to bestow blessing, success or power on those who maintain good relationships or influence God in the use of correct ritual. There is also the assumption that Christianity was related to the new foreign cultures that came with it, in that some Melanesians believed that religion ensured the well-being of the community and that Christianity would operate in a similar vein. Adherence to Christianity, it was hoped, would ensure control over the new foreign culture and its seemingly superior mana and material power.

Expatriate commentators, then, seem to interpret the Melanesian response to Christianity as a question of power. It becomes the way or means to a greater power to be channelled and directed in order to make one’s life successful. This power is accessed through the maintenance of relationships to God, the fulfilment of obligations and through the performing of correct ritual, which would coerce God into giving his blessing. Sin resulted from broken relationships, neglect of obligations or incorrect performing of ritual, incurring God’s wrath.

¹⁰² Ahrens, "Local Church and Theology in Melanesia," 149.

¹⁰³ Lively, "Understanding God in the Payback System: A Model for Christian Discipleship," 59.

¹⁰⁴ Fugmann, "Fundamental Issues for a Melanesian Theology," 92.

¹⁰⁵ May, *Transcendence and Violence: The Encounter of Buddhist, Christian and Primal Traditions*, 49; Gernot Fugmann, "Salvation Expressed in a Melanesian Context," 130.

Whiteman's case study on Gnulahage village on Santa Isabel, Solomon Islands, seems to correspond with those interpreting events in Papua New Guinea. Following Hagesi, he agrees that people viewed Holy Communion as a "ritualistic means for acquiring mana". He argues that the mana concept is operating in the ritual of Holy Communion demonstrated by how seriously people took the service of Preparation for Holy Communion held the night before. Confession of sin and reconciliation must take place before any participation in the communion service. Failure to prepare properly could result in harm, misfortune or sickness, the result of a broken relationship, just as would be the case with "traditional" concepts of mana.¹⁰⁶

What is striking here, is that these are all expatriate commentators writing about their interpretations of Melanesian worldviews across diverse Melanesian cultures. There are very few Melanesian commentators and those who do write tend to support expatriate interpretations, presumably because they are well known, more available as published works and in many cases the only written or published interpretations. For example, Daimoi writing from Papua New Guinea would seem to concur with expatriates that Melanesian concepts were "carried over" into Christianity. The new Christian rituals such as Baptism or Communion came to be associated with traditional rituals and as an opportunity to establish favour with God.¹⁰⁷

Other Melanesian commentators who contribute to the discussion tend to interpret concepts using inherited theological language and terminology. For example, Kendi writing from Papua New Guinea describes Melanesian Christians as having a "strong works based mentality". He claims that, "This mentality conditions the individual to view every outcome as the result of a process in which works plays a big part".¹⁰⁸ Boe writing from the Anglican context of Vanuatu argues that although missionaries taught that "salvation was by faith", such teaching was fiercely individualistic, which reinforced its "foreignness", and "salvation by works" gained prominence among the new convert instead, principally because:

¹⁰⁶ Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, 345-346.

¹⁰⁷ Daimoi, "Understanding Melanesians," 15.

¹⁰⁸ Wayne Kendi, "The Doctrine of Justification: The Remedy to the Ills of the Melanesian Church," *Ibid.* 21 (2005): 87.

...it was similar to indigenous beliefs and practices. In Melanesian traditional culture a person gained mana by what he/she does. Life in this world and life in the world to come is entirely dependent on what you do here and now. Salvation in the Melanesian concept depended on the right relationships you had with the world of the spirits, and these relationships did not depend on beliefs (faith), but on the things you did. The Christian faith, as assimilated by Melanesians, was and still is dependent on what one does.¹⁰⁹

The situation is complex because not only do we have numerous expatriate interpretations of Melanesian Christianity but also Melanesians equally influenced by those same interpretations. The terms “salvation by works vs salvation by faith” or “works based mentality” are loaded terms and arise out of a specific period in European history and from specific stances in European theology. Similarly, when expatriate theologians talk about the concept of “salvation” and how it operates in Melanesian cultures, what “salvation” are they talking about? Salvation is a term shaped and determined by the various Christian denominations and their own particular slant on the concept.

4.3 Spiritual Power and Observable Results

Expatriate commentators such as Bartle make the point that “power” in order to be power must actually do something. In the Melanesian context, mana or power must have results that can be seen and experienced. It is a largely pragmatic concept, the “proof” that mana exists is demonstrated by an observable result.¹¹⁰

Bartle claims that there is a sharp distinction between European Christianity concerned with the importance of right doctrine and “what must I believe”, and the Melanesian worldview fixated on the acquisition of power to achieve fullness of life and “what must I do?”¹¹¹ Other expatriates have also identified the pragmatic nature of religion across Melanesia. Mantovani, for example, argues that Melanesian religions were not

¹⁰⁹ Boe, "The Missionaries and Their Gospel- the Melanesians and Their Response," 117-118.

¹¹⁰ Bartle, *Death, Witchcraft and the Spirit World in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea*, 37; Namunu, "Christian Worship and Melanesian Vision of the Cosmos," 36-55.

¹¹¹ Bartle, *Death, Witchcraft and the Spirit World in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea*, 37-38; Whiteman, "Melanesian Religions: An Overview," 97; Boe, "The Missionaries and Their Gospel- the Melanesians and Their Response," 144-146.

concerned with who or what was the ultimate source of the power required but only in finding access to it. The important question was, who has the power and from whom can it be acquired.¹¹² The Melanesian theologian Pratt, writing from the Solomon Islands context, notes that, “Whatever the object or spirit or animal they [Melanesians] worshipped, it did not matter much, but the main thing was that they could find the power they were looking for which could protect them”.¹¹³

Again, power is a major issue here and according to Boe one of the main reasons why Anglican Christianity was accepted in Vanuatu was its apparent effectiveness as a source of power. He comments, “Traditional Melanesians are concerned more with the question of the effectiveness of religion than the question of whether or not it is a true one”.¹¹⁴ The argument, then, is that Melanesians accepted Christianity on the basis of the superior mana or power of the missionaries, self-evident in their life style and material wealth never seen before in Melanesia. Missionaries were seen to possess superior rituals and a superior religion which could obtain mana and which were more effective than Melanesian religions. Consequently, many of the islanders “traditional” festivals and rituals were replaced with Christian ones that were considered to be far more powerful and which would ensure cosmic life and renewal.¹¹⁵

Disappointment and disillusionment followed when some Melanesians interpreted the material wealth and success of the missionaries as being elusive and out of reach. Consequently, many began to believe they were being cheated and that information was being hidden from them such as how to acquire the mana of the missionaries. In some

¹¹² Mantovani, "Key Issues of a Dialogue between Christianity and Culture in Melanesia."; Ahrens, "Local Church and Theology in Melanesia," 145-146.

¹¹³ John Pratt, "Biblical Understanding of God in Relation to Our Local Dieties and Ancestral Spirits," in *Melanesian Culture and Christian Faith*, ed. Cliff Wright (Honiara: Solomon Islands Christian Association, 1978), 36.

¹¹⁴ Boe, "The Missionaries and Their Gospel- the Melanesians and Their Response," 136.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 137; Geoffrey M White, "Symbols of Solidarity in the Christianization of Santa Isabel, Solomon Islands," in *Culture and Christianity: The Dialectics of Transformation*, ed. George R Saunders, *Contributions to the Study of Anthropology, Number 2* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 15; Francis Harwood, "Intercultural Communication in the Western Solomons: The Methodist Mission and the Emergence of the Christian Fellowship Church," in *Mission, Church, and Sect in Oceania*, ed. James A Boutilier, Daniel T Hughes, and Sharon W Tiffany, *Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania Monograph Series No. 6* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press Ann Arbor, 1978), 239-240; Harold M Ross, "Competition for Baegu Souls: Mission Rivalry on Malaita Solomon Islands," in *Mission, Church, and Sect in Oceania*, ed. James A Boutilier, Daniel T Hughes, and Sharon W Tiffany, *Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania Monograph Series* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press Ann Arbor, 1978), 191; Tavoia, "Towards Melanesian Christianity with Special Reference to Belief in Spirits in Islands of North Pentecost", 23.

cases, missions were abandoned and traditional religious methods reinstated, albeit altered to fit the new situation, in the hope of finding the “secret” to acquire mana. This is a theme echoed throughout Melanesian theology, particularly, in the examination of “cargo cults” across Papua New Guinea and may explain the apparent decline of interest in church attendance and activities alluded to in both Maeliau’s account of South Sea Evangelical Church worship in Solomon Islands and Schwartz writing in Papua New Guinea. For both, the implication in this apparent decline is that Christian worship is perceived as dull, lifeless and crucially powerless.¹¹⁶

Another way of coming to terms with powerlessness is discussed in Fugmann who refers to how some Melanesian Christians, when trying to reason why God’s power is not as apparent today as it once was, argue that it is because Christian priests generally do not prepare sufficiently for celebrating and participating in key rituals such as Holy Communion, Baptism or Confession of sin. When people do not prepare properly, then they are not holy before God and so God’s power remains inactive and hidden from them.¹¹⁷

The various views of both Melanesians and expatriate commentators make this discussion of mana extremely complex. It is difficult to compare the interaction of a Christian denomination with Melanesian cultures in one specific region of Melanesia with another and more so when the interpreters are themselves products of theological contexts and worldviews that shape what they interpret and interact with what they experience. In addition, those commentators are interpreting “Melanesia” from different contexts and timelines. For example Pratt is interpreting events in 1978, Whiteman in 1983, Boe in 1999 and Bartle more recently in 2005. While there are some

¹¹⁶ Michael Maeliau, "Searching for a Melanesian Way of Worship," in *The Gospel Is Not Western: Black Theologies from the Southwest Pacific*, ed. G W Trompf (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987), 119; Brian Schwarz, "Holy Spirit Movements," in *An Introduction to Melanesian Religions*, ed. Ennio Mantovani, *Point Series No. 6* (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service., 1984), 272. Interestingly Wright noted that in the results of the Melanesian Culture and Christian Faith Workshop, many villagers thought that the traditional ways of praying were more powerful than Christian ones. He notes that it was affirmed that before the coming of Christianity if you asked for prosperity you got it, but in the Christian Church when you pray nothing happens. See Wright, "Melanesian Culture and Christian Faith: Report of an Education Workshop, Auki, Malaita, Solomon Islands October 12th-26th, 1978," 21. Aike also refers to his friends who had given up praying because nothing ever happened. One reason for this is the belief that God is not interested and too remote. See Aike, "Reflections on Culture, Ancestors and Worship in the Solomon Islands," 41,43; Tavoia, "Towards Melanesian Christianity with Special Reference to Belief in Spirits in Islands of North Pentecost", 30.

¹¹⁷ Fugmann, "Salvation Expressed in a Melanesian Context," 129. Compare also to the Melanesian Brotherhood and people’s perceptions of their mana.

commonalities between them, Melanesian cultures in their interaction with Christianity, other cultures outside Melanesia and each other ensure rapid culture change. What may have been the case in 1983 may not be in 2005, or has become more pronounced or shifted focus. All of these make any comparison between commentators difficult.

Yet there are some commonalities, in that almost all commentators, across denominations, timelines and diverse European theologies, identify mana or power as a driving force in the various versions of Melanesian Christianity. Writers as theologically and denominationally diverse as Stilwell, Mantovani, Rowsome, Wright, Ahrens, Boe, Fugmann and Lively all identify power as a key issue.¹¹⁸ All but one of these writers are expatriate and represent a number of diverse European theologies, whether Catholic, Evangelical, Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist, but all of them identify mana or power as a common theme and concern.

Furthermore, there is acknowledgement of how mana is essential for protection, blessing and for access to life itself. Another recurring theme is how Melanesian concepts of mana and how they operate are carried over into various Christian contexts, a situation already evident in my assessment of mana in the Melanesian Brotherhood discussed in previous chapters.

Such commonalities enable me to focus directly on two specific theological contributions to the question of mana in Melanesia. Although written from two completely different contexts and countries, both are significant in that they are dealing with similar concepts, be it from different theological positions. I will now focus directly on these contributions to Melanesian theology assessing both as a way forward in addressing the specific issue of mana in the Melanesian Brotherhood.

¹¹⁸ See Ewan Stilwell, "Towards a Melanesian Theology of Conversion," *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 9, no. 1 (1993): 32-33; Fugmann, "Fundamental Issues for a Melanesian Theology," 92; Ahrens, "Concepts of Power in a Melanesian and Biblical Perspective," 81,83; Lively, "Understanding God in the Payback System: A Model for Christian Discipleship," 65; Rowsome, "Melanesian Traditional Religion," 53; Wright, "Melanesian Culture and Christian Faith: Report of an Education Workshop, Auki, Malaita, Solomon Islands October 12th-26th, 1978," 12; Boe, "The Missionaries and Their Gospel- the Melanesians and Their Response," 137.

4.4 Toward a Theology of Power for Melanesia - T. Wayne Dye

In a two-part article, Dye, an expatriate working in Papua New Guinea, attempts to deal with the mana issue from the Papua New Guinea context primarily because he recognizes that the existence and importance of supernatural power in human life is a basic assumption of Melanesians. In one sense, he is responding to an already established theology of mana primarily, as he explains, “to conform this theology to what the Scriptures really teach”.¹¹⁹ He also recognizes that ignoring the issue of power in Melanesia means leaving a key issue in Melanesian theology unresolved namely, how is God’s power relevant to the daily life and problems of the Melanesian context? If such an issue remains unresolved then the assumption may be, as other writers have identified, that God’s power is irrelevant to daily life and so other sources of power are sought out instead. Dye’s own theological position becomes clear as his work develops. He describes himself as an evangelical and his own theological agenda is clear as he explains:

I consider the Bible to be the only reliable source of theological information and completely authoritative over the beliefs and actions of every Christian....Therefore any teaching, no matter how relevant to one’s audience, which disagrees with the Scriptures must be rejected. The purpose of Christian teaching is to impart its truth, not to adjust it to the views of others.¹²⁰

He begins by attempting to define mana and recognizes that while the concept is widespread, there are many variations and that there is “no ordered doctrinal system for the concept”.¹²¹ However, he does define it as a type of “life force” identified with health, success, power and strength.¹²² It is in the second part of his article however, where he begins to compare the mana concept to what he sees as relevant biblical concepts focusing particularly on “blessing” in the Old Testament and “power” in the New Testament. While recognizing that there is considerable overlap between Melanesian worldviews and biblical concepts of supernatural power, he discusses not

¹¹⁹ Wayne T Dye, "Toward a Theology of Power for Melanesia Part 1," *Catalyst* 14, no. 1 (1984): 74. Dye is concerned with conforming the theology of mana to the Scriptures. Note that my research does not deal directly with the Scriptural texts themselves. I am concerned with the interaction between Melanesian theologies and significant theologies from other contexts. All of these are in themselves interpretations of the Scriptural understanding of power.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 59.

only the difference of origins in both but also an essential difference in how both are used and for what purpose. Essentially mana is defined as power to be successful with “success” defined by the unbelieving world. God’s power on the other hand is “success” defined by Christian values whose purpose is to enable Christians to do God’s work more effectively.¹²³

Here then, it seems, is a crucial part of his argument in developing a theology of power as he elaborates:

In the most profound sense, a theology of power is not formulated. It is demonstrated, exemplified, lived. The heart of any effective teaching about power will be demonstrations of God at work in and through Christians, to heal and strengthen and show His greatness.¹²⁴

Here the demonstration of God’s power is critical and more so, he argues, in the Melanesian context where miracles are the expected result of God’s presence. Lack of miracles on the other hand is a demonstration of the powerlessness and untruthfulness of the Gospel. His conclusion then is that no missionary should teach about power without praying for miracles. In his view, there has been much teaching in Melanesia but very little demonstration that God’s power is real and available.¹²⁵ For Dye, to teach without demonstrating God’s power is to “deny the truth of one’s teaching”.¹²⁶ The best approach for use in Melanesia is, “Teach the truth, and expect accompanying signs of God’s power. If we take the step to pray and expect, He will work”.¹²⁷

There are two important comments to make here: first, Dye’s assertion that there is little demonstration of God’s power is not the case in the context of the Melanesian Brotherhood or the Church of Melanesia as has been argued and demonstrated throughout this thesis. God’s power as blessing or success, for example, is available and the Melanesian Brotherhood not only demonstrates this but also provides access to it. The question is not so much the lack of demonstration of power but rather the definition, motivation and manipulation of the power that is demonstrated.

¹²³ Wayne T Dye, "Toward a Theology of Power for Melanesia Part 2," *Ibid.*, no. 2: 167.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 174.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 174.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 175.

Secondly, Dye is advocating a theology of power which encourages and makes use of miracles as demonstrations of God's power. He outlines various criteria to be taught when developing it, including God being the most powerful being and creator, the existence of angels as obedient to him, the existence of other spiritual beings under the control of Satan, a stress on non-reliance on other sources of power, the Holy Spirit as a basic source of power, the right use of power and so on. Yet within his argument he also claims the following point:

To live as He commands may require us to be hungry or sick; it may mean to accept persecution or allow an enemy to defeat us. 'Victory' in such circumstances comprises living with attitudes of love, joy, peace, patience, etc.; it does not necessarily mean defeating our human enemies. If we suffer, we must not think His power has failed; it is just fulfilling its purpose....The proof, therefore, of God's power is not always material blessing or fertility or even political or social success. It is a Christlike character and the accomplishment of what He wants done.¹²⁸

Here we see Dye's attempt to balance two theological positions. On the one hand, he is advocating a theology of power, while on the other allowing for a theology of suffering and vulnerability. Yet, these two theological positions remain in tension with each other and he offers no way in which to reconcile or resolve them. In the case of the Melanesian Brotherhood, a stress on the continual demonstration of God's power or miracle simply reinforces an existing interpretation of the Brotherhood's mana, its application and the criteria as to why it is effective or not, as the case may be.

On the other hand, we have the possibility of suffering and defeat, which may well be the fulfilling of God's purpose and a sign of power in itself. Yet, the question remains, what happens when the miracle or demonstration of power fails to materialise? We may be able to say that God's power is demonstrated in ways we do not expect, but a reliance on some form of demonstration only exasperates the existing expectation of how God's power is expected to operate. The question remains that if this "power" does not materialise, is it a question of God's failure or that of God's people doing something wrong?

¹²⁸ Ibid., 177.

A reliance on God's demonstration of power means a continuing fixation on power itself, which may simply encourage the continuing search for its acquisition and manipulation. In addition to this problem, when that power does not materialise explanations will continue to focus on the apparent failure of mana and the reasons as to why it failed, which in turn simply reinforces a theology fixated on power and its observable results and consequences. In short Dye has identified two distinct theological approaches to the power question but offers no way to reconcile the tension between them and he may be encouraging a continuing reliance of power demonstrations in societies already fixated with it. The result is that the argument remains unsatisfactory for the specific context that we are dealing with.

4.5 A Theology of "Mana" or A Theology of Vulnerability - Nigel Francis Kelaepa

Kelaepa, an Anglican priest and tutor of the Melanesian Brotherhood, offers a theological approach to the power question that is much more specific to the context we are working in. In two articles written in the aftermath of the murder of the seven Brothers, Kelaepa recognizes similar theological approaches to those I have discussed in Dye, which he terms a theology of mana and a theology of vulnerability. His argument is based on the view that the Church of Melanesia was founded on the idea that God is directly active in miraculous/supernatural power encounters or through existing human institutions within society, this being the result of a conversion process based on power encounter and the acceptance of the "superior" mana of Christianity.¹²⁹ This has permeated Christian thought to the extent that when the Brothers were murdered a common response was, "Why did God not intervene through His mighty power to save these brave and faithful young men, the same power that destroyed pagan shrines and places of worship?"¹³⁰

This question and others like it revolve around the question of whether Brothers and Christians generally, still have access to God's direct power or, "Are the days of miracles and power encounters now gone?"¹³¹

¹²⁹ Kelaepa, "A Theology of Mana or a Theology of Vulnerability," 12.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

Kelaepa argues that the murder of the seven Brothers has acted as a catalyst to generate questions that strike at the core of Melanesian Christian faith, questions that bring two distinct theological viewpoints into focus. The essential question is whether, “Is it now time for Melanesian Christians to be re-orientated away from a theology steeped in its emphasis on mana (power), to a theology of vulnerability, or is it a case of holding both together?”¹³² He responds to his own question by arguing that God’s supreme use of power is demonstrated on the cross, revealed in a seemingly vulnerable and defeatist act. The two theological positions are therefore reconciled in this great Christian paradox.¹³³ Kelaepa maintains that both a theology of mana and a theology of vulnerability are of equal importance and undivorceable from each other, and a balanced church must hold the two together because, “We cannot remove the powerful miracles of Jesus Christ from the gospel message anymore than we can his vulnerable humanity and subsequent death on the event of the cross”.¹³⁴

Kelaepa is suggesting here that the two views must be held together in a kind of balancing act that plots a middle course between them. Such a balance then would avoid the dangers of focusing too much on one or the other. For example an over-identification with mana may lead to an overzealous regard to prove God’s power and superiority to the world and a running after the spectacular and sensational even when God does not will it.¹³⁵ Too much focus on vulnerability on the other hand, may lead to an avoidance of any bold or sensational act for fear of magic or a belief that the time of miracles is over.¹³⁶

This middle course, argues Kelaepa, allows for a balanced emphasis on both positions and the recognition of situations, “which call for demonstrations of one or the other or both, theological concepts and realities; neither holding one over the other”.¹³⁷ The ability to discern which one is applicable to the situation will come from the Holy Spirit who guides and informs the process.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid; Kelaepa, "The Great Christian Paradox," 7.

¹³⁴ Kelaepa, "A Theology of Mana or a Theology of Vulnerability," 12.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

Kelaepa's analysis is one that not only recognizes the existence of two distinct theological positions but also takes both seriously in an effort to resolve the theological questions and tensions generated by the context and the church. Yet his use of the term "demonstration" betrays the fact that his argument is still tied to the continual need to either "demonstrate" power or vulnerability depending on the particular situation. While he maintains that the two viewpoints cannot be divorced from each other, the danger is that we begin continually to measure or grade demonstrations using either power or vulnerability as a yardstick, not to mention having to continually decide, in a rather dualistic fashion, which one is appropriate for the situation.

Kelaepa's work is very much theology in development and, as two short articles cannot be expected to articulate a full blown theology, he has begun a process that identifies tensions within Melanesian theology, yet his call for balance does not resolve that tension. The two viewpoints of power and vulnerability continue to sit uneasily with each other and the question remains whether they can be reconciled together within the Melanesian context or must one be abandoned in favour of the other?

Both Dye and Kelaepa have begun a process of questioning and dialoguing with mana as a key Melanesian concept, and both recognize the fundamental importance of doing so. While both approaches may not satisfactorily resolve the question of power in Melanesia, they do, it seems, point to a deeper question about how mana is used. The treatment of mana in Melanesian theology may be somewhat tentative and preliminary but the various writers are all pointing to the issue of how mana operates in and interacts with the Christian context. The questions of how, why, and for what purpose mana is used reveal deeper questions about the use or abuse of mana and the motivation for using it in the first place. These are critical questions for any theology of mana. If mana is operating in the Christian context, yet determined by how it used to operate in Melanesian worldviews, then the implication is that the tension in Melanesian theology is not so much between power and vulnerability, but rather between two versions of mana that are fundamentally different or even opposed to each other. One operates out of a Melanesian belief system and guarantees material success and power for personal benefit and acquisition. This involves the manipulation of God's mana for personal well-being.

The other is all about a mana that operates not for the benefit of the wielder but for the empowerment and well-being of the Christian community, a mana which continues to exist and interact with key Melanesian concepts but which has been transformed to operate in the Christian context. Both of these are paradoxically different yet emerge out of the continual interaction between versions of Christianity received into Melanesia and the existing Melanesian worldviews. They exist, for example, in the Melanesian Brotherhood, in tension with each other. Melanesian theology seems to be identifying such a tension but has not come to grips with it in any substantial way.

5. Conclusion

It is clear from our discussion of Melanesian theology that the task of doing theology in Melanesia is extremely complex. The diversity of Melanesian cultures makes it difficult, or some would argue impossible, to develop Melanesian theologies that speak to Melanesians across cultures and regions, and the issue is further complicated by the expatriate contribution to “Melanesian Theology”. The question “What is Melanesian theology?” is a difficult one to answer, because it seems, at least on one level, to be a rather fragmented series of theologies emerging and developing in specific regions of Melanesia. Many of these theologies are either written by expatriates determined by their own European theological context and Christian denomination or by Melanesians who tend to follow methods and models taught and inherited from those European theological traditions.

In essence, then the question of what Melanesian theology really is becomes most important. Is it simply an expatriate construct that instead of representing the issues and concerns of Melanesians instead projects expatriate issues and concerns onto Melanesians? Those issues and concerns may have their origins in various European theological traditions and not in Melanesia at all. The perceived “foreignness” of the theology taught and developed in theological institutions across Melanesia that some writers identify and the perceived differentiation between the official religion of the churches and the popular religion of Melanesians in the village setting seem to be symptoms of this complex identity issue within Melanesian theology.

Yet, we must also be careful not to assume that Melanesians have had no part in the development of Melanesian theology either. In some ways, Melanesian theology is the result of the interaction between Melanesians and the various versions of Christianity they have received. Melanesians are just like any other peoples, in the sense that they do not simply receive a religion passively, but are continually interacting with it and developing it in relation to their own cultural and social context. The process of making Christianity relevant to Melanesians began when Melanesians first converted and Melanesian theology is the attempt to make sense of their interaction. Crucially this process is continuous, meaning that Melanesian theology must also be fluid and dynamic as it makes sense of equally fluid and dynamic cultural and theological interaction across Melanesia. If interpreted in this way, Melanesian theology is more than simply a type of theological construct created by expatriates. While expatriates did provide the impetus for Melanesian theological reflection and still write much of it, my overview of Melanesian theology suggests that is very much theology under construction and as it develops, so the roles of people involved shift. It is evident, for example that the role of expatriates has shifted from instigators to supporters of Melanesians doing theology for themselves. This implies that as Melanesians write theology the agendas and boundaries of theological reflection will continue to shift, particularly as Melanesians question the European theological traditions and assumptions they have inherited.

Yet, while we recognize the diversity of Christian denominations present in Melanesia and the largely European theologies they represent, we must also be aware that the interaction between them and the cultures they encountered were also diverse. Often when Melanesian theologians talk of missionaries they are referring to their experience of missionaries from their own cultural and denominational context, but that experience is different from one region and denomination to the next. Consequently, those missionaries and denominations cannot be lumped together and labelled as all being the same.

The difficulty of making any theological generalizations across Melanesia does not, however, preclude the possibility of commonalities. Alongside the issue of identity, those doing theology in Melanesia have identified concepts that theology could dialogue with and which have the potential to form the basis for a Melanesian theology. Such

concepts include “fullness of life” and “well-being” as key ideals in the Melanesian worldview. Connected to the search for fullness of life are the interconnected roles of community and relationships and, importantly for our discussion, mana and the search for power. Theologians such as Mantovani recognize the potential for a Melanesian theology to dialogue with, and develop from, a holistic Melanesian worldview centred on the search for fullness of life. Others, such as Boseto, begin from the notion of community, Tabe from reciprocal relationship, and Dye and Kelaepa from mana. All of these, it seems, provide the theologian with a starting point for the development of Melanesian theology, and as such concepts are interconnected, any theology which does develop should intersect or complement others which begin from a similar position. Such an approach would seem to be sensible and take the interaction between Melanesian cultures and Christianity seriously. It also seems to need to work from a basic theological assumption, namely that Melanesian culture is a basic source for theological reflection and, by implication, has God’s presence already within it. Such an assumption would allow Christianity not only to dialogue with the existing traditions but also to build on them and, by implication, expand and transform them in the light of the Gospel.

Melanesian theology may well be fragmented and tentative. It may well not provide us with a developed theology to deal with the issue of mana in the Melanesian Brotherhood but it has, in many cases, begun to build bridges with existing Melanesian cultures and begin somewhat tentatively to articulate how the coming of Christianity transforms and builds on what is already there. The issue of mana, its use, and the motivation for using it, are connected to the search for fullness of life, and the role of community and relationships within life itself. If theology in Melanesia is to come to grips with mana it has to work from the existing cultural tradition and articulate how Christianity engages with, expands and transforms that culture.

Yet, at the same time it is imperative that theologians engaged in this task are aware of their own cultural and contextual limitations. Melanesian theology is complex because often theologians are seemingly unaware of how relative their theological positions actually are. This does not prevent anyone from doing theology in Melanesia but it does call for theologians to declare their own theological positions and to be critiqued on that basis.

The work of theologians in Melanesia on mana gives me a starting point in my own theological reflection on the Melanesian Brotherhood, but as it is somewhat fragmented and preliminary, it is only a start. In the next chapter, I will look at some non-Melanesian theologies of power in the attempt to find concepts that have potential to be utilized and applied to some of the key Melanesian concepts identified here. These may hold the key for a way forward in the addressing of the mana issue and the theological tensions present within the Melanesian Brotherhood and beyond.

Chapter 7

Non-Melanesian Theologies of Power

1. *Introduction*

Following my identification of the theological problem and examination of Melanesian theology in the previous chapters I now focus on specific non-Melanesian theologies of power in European and North Atlantic contexts, the aim being to locate concepts that are useful in an on-going dialogue with Melanesian theology. I have selected three specific theologies because they all articulate concepts that, once connections are made between them, can help to develop a response to the question of mana in the Melanesian context. These particular theologies are process theology, feminist theology and liberation theology, and are selected because of their potential relevance to theologies and concepts operating in the Melanesian context.¹

Process theology is selected primarily because it focuses on an understanding of God's essential relatedness to the world, redefines divine power in terms of relationship and develops an understanding of God as influenced by the risk and vulnerability of that relationship. Feminist theology on the other hand develops a concept of relational power involving God as relationship, the responsibilities of human beings towards God as relationship and the importance of right relationship, defining sin as the breaking of this essential relatedness to God and to each other. Liberation theology stresses how power can be corrupted into a destructive force and is confronted by a God of life whose power lies not in domination but rather a power to love, which transforms power from death to life.

All three of these theologies suggest a transformation of power as control or domination to power in or as relationships. My examination of these theological strands will enable me to make connections to a Melanesian context where concepts of an interconnecting web of relationships which maintains life, self-deriving meaning from community and a recognition of the negative effects of broken relationships all exist. Such connections

¹ Although liberation theology emerged out of the Latin American context, the methodology liberation theologians construct relies on their experience of theology in a European and North Atlantic context. It is theology which interprets European theology and responds to it.

will then allow me, standing at the intersection between European and Melanesian theologies of power to construct a theology of relational power that addresses the theological tensions in the Melanesian Brotherhood and beyond.

2. Power in European Theology: The Recent Context

Before any examination of the theological strands I have selected, there is a need to situate these theologies and explore why they all seek to redefine power from domination to relationship or empowerment in the first place. Woodhead gives a useful overview of recent attitudes towards power in European theology. In her assessment of Christianity she concludes that it began “with a religion that was marginal to social power, and ends with a religion that has become marginal to social power once more”.² In her assessment of the twentieth century she claims that “in just three decades, between 1970 and 2000 Christianity has collapsed in parts of the northern hemisphere”.³ The reason, she contends, is due to the erosion of long-established forms of social order and moral control due in part to a general dissatisfaction with established hierarchical orders and a “subjective turn to the self”.⁴ This subjective turn, she argues, arises out of the championing of individual rights by Enlightenment thinkers in the eighteenth century and the self-reliance, individual creativity and authenticity of Romanticism in the nineteenth century. This, coupled with feminist and socialist attacks on bourgeois male power, led to a widespread sense of the sovereign right to freedom and self-determination of every individual human being.⁵ This, argues Woodhead, was made possible by the vast socio-economic changes that took place within the twentieth century which empowered groups such as the working classes and women like never before.⁶

² Linda Woodhead, *An Introduction to Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 404.

³ *Ibid.*, 353.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 333.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 333-334.

⁶ Accounts of the decline of Christianity in Western Europe can be found in Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustorf, eds., *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). McLeod gives a socio-historical overview of this decline in the introduction and other chapters in the book describe it in various European contexts. See Yves Lambert, "New Christianity, Indifference and Diffused Spirituality," in *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750-2000*, ed. Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustorf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 66-69; Hugh McLeod, ed., *The Cambridge History of Christianity: World Christianities C. 1914-2000*, vol. 9, *The Cambridge History of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Hugh McLeod, *Religion and the People of Western Europe 1789-1989*, ed. Christopher Butler, Robert Evans, and John Skorupski, *Opus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). For an account of events in England

Here Woodhead points to a shift in which traditional forms of authority and conformity were questioned and rejected in favour of the empowerment and self-development of the individual. The questioning of authority in Christianity is, of course, not new, but Gunton argues that the roots of the modern dissatisfaction with hierarchical power structures can be traced to the Reformation and Protestantism's embracing of individualism and rationalism.⁷ According to the American theologian, West, however, the scientific-technological revolution that followed in the centuries after was only made possible by the proclamation of the Gospel in the world. Scientists, humanists and rationalists, he contends, were spurred on by the anthropocentric teaching of Christianity which, according to Berdyaev, had "freed humanity from subjection to nature, and had set humans up spiritually in the centre of the created world".⁸

West argues that the Reformation attack on Church authority coupled with the rise of individualism and rationalism, together with Christian teaching that proclaimed humanity to be at the centre of the created world, inspired scientists to develop theories that subjected nature to humanity, and provided modern society with its fundamental motivating power.⁹ The rise of individualism led to a suspicion and rejection of traditional authority structures, and the elevation of human beings above them, evident in the expansion of human power over nature. West contends that the discovery that nature can be tapped and channelled to expand the possibilities of human life, led to the emergence of two forms of humanist ideology that would profoundly influence European thought and theology.¹⁰

see Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity 1920-2000*, Fourth ed. (London: SCM Press, 2001).

⁷ Colin Gunton, "Authority," in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought: Intellectual, Spiritual and Moral Horizons of Christianity*, ed. Adrian Hastings Alistair Mason and Hugh Pyper (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 56; Paul Lakeland, *Postmodernity: Christian Identity in a Fragmented Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 40; James B Miller, "The Emerging Postmodern World," in *Postmodern Theology*, ed. Frederic B Burnham (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1989), 3.

⁸ Charles C West, *Power, Truth and Community in Modern Culture*, ed. Alan Neely H Wayne Pipkin and Wilbert R Shenk, *Christian Mission and Modern Culture* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999), 115; Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History* (London: G. Bles, 1936).

⁹ West, *Power, Truth and Community in Modern Culture*, 115-116; Philip Luscombe, *Groundwork of Science and Religion* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2000); Peter Barrett, *Science and Theology since Copernicus: The Search for Understanding* (London: T&T Clark International, 2004); R Hooykaas, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Science*, Reprinted ed. (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1977), 98-149.

¹⁰ West, *Power, Truth and Community in Modern Culture*, 117; Jeff Astley, David Brown, and Ann Loades, eds., *Science and Religion*, vol. 4, *Problems in Theology* (London: T & T Clark International, 2004).

The first type West identifies is a form of humanist rationalism rooted in optimism for the potential of human beings. Using methods of scientific and technological invention, nature could be managed and planned for the benefit of humanity, and misuse of power could be controlled by self-interested reason.¹¹ Free individual choices in the economic marketplace would also ensure a natural progression of general prosperity for all. God in such a scheme was symbolic of the reason, goodness and power of human beings realizing their potential in steady progress and development. Seen negatively however, God could become an obstacle to that security and progress or, as Bonhoeffer argues, pushed out to the margins of human life to be conveniently wheeled out for explanations when human knowledge failed to provide an answer.¹²

For West, this kind of rationalism profoundly affects the world in which we live and the scientific, technological and economic structures which it helped to create continually dominate global societies today. According to Schweiker, this has led, at least in the Western world, to the development of a post-theistic society where humanity becomes the sole agent in reality and that fundamental norms and values that concern human well-being are no longer consistent with, or dependent upon, God at all.¹³

The second form of humanist ideology that West identifies is Marxism which he claims challenged humanist rationalism to its core. Sharing the humanist confidence in human ability and potential, Marxism attacked economic systems as dehumanising and which alienated workers from the fruits of their own labour, and he attacked religion for its hypocrisy in reinforcing and justifying unjust economic structures. Human potential could only be realized when private ownership and control was replaced by collective ownership.¹⁴

West contends that both ideologies came to be involved in a power struggle with each other yet shared similar characteristics. He writes, "Both replaced God with true

¹¹ Diogenes Allen, "Christian Values," in *Postmodern Theology*, ed. Frederic B Burnham (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1989), 24.

¹² See for example Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge, Enlarged ed. (London: SCM Press, 1971), 325-326.

¹³ West, *Power, Truth and Community in Modern Culture*, 113; William Schweiker, "Power and the Agency of God: On the Transvaluation of Power from a Theological-Ethical Perspective," in *Power, Powerlessness, and the Divine: New Inquiries in Bible and Theology*, ed. Cynthia L Rigby (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 109-110.

¹⁴ West, *Power, Truth and Community in Modern Culture*, 113.

humanity, and Christ with human planners as agents of salvation. Both try to bring in the kingdom by human power".¹⁵ His conclusion, however, is that both ideologies have failed. The optimism of humanist rationalism, along with the liberal theological positions which supported it, were shattered by the horrors of the First World War. Moreover, as the twentieth century progressed, another war would soon follow and even then, after allied victory in 1945, instability, tension and further wars would eventuate. Confidence in Western civilization was shaken not only by the reality of Christians fighting each other across trenches, but also by economic difficulties and mounting social division across colonial empires.¹⁶

In addition, as the twentieth century progressed, the free choice in the marketplace and mainstay of the capitalist system did not produce a natural prosperity for all. Instead, it ended up producing powers and situations with which its ideology could not deal, and a system which generates unequal and unregulated wealth for a minority across the world at the expense of the majority. Schweiker argues that the development of new technologies adds to this problem by extending human power and allowing new and more destructive ways to exploit nature for the benefit of the few. By implication, the moral and ethical questions that such new technologies develop are not answered by the old ideologies either.¹⁷

Marxism, on the other hand, failed because its ideal of a communal society where power is surrendered to the community and property shared, simply did not work. The ideal could not control the powers of human nature, and so when the communist system began to collapse from 1989 onwards, it was the collapse of an inherently corrupt system, far from the ideals of Marx himself. West argues that these are powers and ideologies that have evolved out of conditions made possible by Christian thought and that have moved far beyond its control, the result being anxiety, disillusionment and loss of faith.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid., 114.

¹⁶ Woodhead, *An Introduction to Christianity*, 374; Douglas John Hall, *Hope against Hope: Towards an Indigenous Theology of the Cross*, ed. David L Swain, World Student Christian Federation Books (Geneva: WSCF Books, 1971), 16-19.

¹⁷ Schweiker, "Power and the Agency of God: On the Transvaluation of Power from a Theological-Ethical Perspective," 109-110; West, *Power, Truth and Community in Modern Culture*, 123.

¹⁸ West, *Power, Truth and Community in Modern Culture*, 116.

Tomlin, on the other hand points to the “Western” church being associated with authoritarian power and domination. This is under question in a post-theistic world, which values the rights of the individual over and against hierarchical authority structures.¹⁹ The result for Huber is that the church’s association with power has been predominately seen as negative. He argues that church history “offers many examples of the misuse of legitimate or usurped power. They include forced conversions, persecution of heretics, and the subtler forms of spiritual coercion and bureaucratic rule”.²⁰

Dostoyevsky’s Grand Inquisitor is for Newbigin, a symbol of how the church had become an oppressor of human freedom and reinforced a general suspicion of divine and church authority. This, argues Webster, would only deepen in the twentieth century with, for example, the German Church’s legitimisation of dictatorship and support for Hitler during the 1930s and 1940s out of which came the Holocaust, the largest single slaughter of people in human history.²¹ This, notes Ruether, happened in the heartland of Western Christian Europe, a region which produced the classics of modern European literature, music, philosophy, theology and biblical studies and perhaps more disturbingly happened “with the passive acquiescence or active collaboration of most European Christians, and with no decisive protest from church leadership, Catholic or Protestant”.²²

These examples seem to point to a general lack of confidence in both Western Christianity and Christian authority in the world, and this is recognized by theologians. Consequently, any writing on a theology of power is likely to be acutely sensitive to the last fifty years or so, and will find it difficult to posit a positive or even neutral view of

¹⁹ Graham Tomlin, *The Power of the Cross: Theology and the Death of Christ in Paul, Luther and Pascal*, Paternoster Biblical and Theological Monographs (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999), 311-312.

²⁰ Wolfgang Lipp, Wolfgang Huber, and Heinz-Gunther Stobbe, "Power," in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. Erwin Fahlbusch, et al. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B Eerdmans, 2005), 312.

²¹ Lesslie Newbigin, *Truth and Authority in Modernity*, ed. H Wayne Pipkin, William R Shenk, and Alan Neely, *Christian Mission and Modern Culture* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1996), 64; J B Webster, "Some Notes on the Theology of Power," *Modern Churchman* XXX, no. 1 (1988): 17-18.

²² Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Holocaust: Theological and Ethical Reflections," in *The Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview*, ed. Gregory Baum (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 76.

power as a phenomenon.²³ Stobbe argues that to seek, hold and use power in the church, “often seem in advance to be politically suspect and morally questionable”.²⁴

The interpretations of Christianity outlined above are useful in understanding the attitudes of European theologies towards power. Nevertheless, they remain interpretations from theologians working from specific social locations and are therefore contextually relative. For example, while taking account of the various forms of Christian traditions around the world, Woodhead’s interpretation of Christianity is still very much a European one, determined in part by her own social location of living and working in Britain. West, on the other hand, is working out of a North American context and while that will colour his interpretation of theology, he is also influenced by an inherited “European” interpretation of Christianity.

Both Woodhead and West’s analysis of European context see power identified in predominantly negative terms as a misuse of “authoritarian structures” or “domination”. This kind of analysis determines the types of theologies which emerge, namely theologies which attempt to move away from concepts of power as “authority”, “control” or “domination”. Yet these are interpretations which are contextually relative. They do not preclude quite different interpretations of the same events, nor theologians working in either the same or different contexts viewing power completely differently and positing theologies that do not seek the redefinition of power in the same terms.

The point is that the theological strands that I select for inter-cultural dialogue with Melanesian theology are a result of a particular interpretation of European context and a response to the negative connotations associated with power. They are theologies as contextual as the Melanesian theologies with which they are to engage.

²³ S W Sykes, "Episcopate and Power in the Church," in *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck*, ed. Bruce C Marshall (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 197; James P Mackey, *Power and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 3; Lipp, Huber, and Stobbe, "Power," 313.

²⁴ Lipp, Huber, and Stobbe, "Power," 313.

2.1 The Necessity of Power

While power may well have negative connotations within European theology, the questioning of authoritarian power structures leads to a questioning of what power actually is and how it operates in the world. Power is then often associated with largely negative concepts such as authority or domination that are then questioned, attacked or rejected. Yet this is a very narrow interpretation of power determined by a particular interpretation which stresses the negative effects of power in certain historical contexts. Authority, control or domination are only facets of a multifaceted concept that has deep roots in human life and existence. Theologians such as Loomer, Poling and Sykes all recognize that power does not have a purely negative connotation and is manifest in human life and in our relationships with each other.²⁵ All three of these theologians call for not only recognition of power but a positive redefinition of it as essential to human life and existence.²⁶ Humanity, according to Sykes, is enmeshed in a world of overlapping and intersecting powers that make up life itself. Humanity cannot avoid contact with power, or the exercising of power, in one form or another. The power to be, to create or to make a difference is, as Poling suggests, inherent to life itself.²⁷

Power, seen in this sense is neither positive nor negative. Percy, a British theologian seeking to redefine power, argues that power is a noun, but often runs together with verbs and assumes the character of those verbs. For example, when power is described as “exploitative” “manipulative” or “competitive” it is a noun being described as a verb. The point being that power in a sense loses its reality. To describe power in negative terms is not to describe power at all, but rather how it is used. This is important because if power is recognized as neither inherently positive nor negative yet essential to life itself, then it calls for a redefinition of power focused on the implications for a positive or negative use of power.

²⁵ Stephen Sykes, *Power and Christian Theology* (London: Continuum, 2006), 2.

²⁶ Bernard M Loomer, "Two Kinds of Power," in *The Future Church of 140 B.C.E: A Hidden Revolution*, ed. Bernard J Lee (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 169; Rudolf Von Sinner, "Religion and Power: Towards the Political Sustainability of the World," in *A Different World Is Possible*, ed. Luiz Carlos Susin, Jon Sobrino, and Felix Wilfred, *Concilium* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 2004), 102-103.

²⁷ James N Poling, *The Abuse of Power: A Theological Problem* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 24; Daniel L Migliore, *The Power of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 18; William S Schmidt, "Power as Theological Problem," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 46, no. 1 (1992): 71; Klaus Hemmerle, "Power," in *Encyclopedia of Theology*, ed. Karl Rahner (London: Burns & Oates, 1975), 1264.

Any such redefinition is a response to a context that often sees power negatively yet is pushing the boundaries of that context by suggesting that the point is not the rejection of power but rather its acceptance as part of life itself and its potential to become a more positive force.

More specifically, Christian theology has to deal with power one way or another because not only is it an essential attribute of God in traditional theism as omnipotence, but also because Christ was involved and interacting with it on various levels. Christ dying as a powerless victim of the social and political powers of his day and his refusal to succumb to the temptation to wield power, only reinforces the need for Christian theologians to engage with it as a concept. According to Tomlin, "If the Son of God died as a powerless victim of political and religious necessities, then a theology built from this point raises the issue of power and how it operates within the church, in a quite specific way".²⁸

3. Power as Domination

Often theologians seeking to redefine concepts of power argue from the premise that power has become a predominantly negative or destructive force associated with terms such as domination or coercion. Both Percy and Loomer are examples of this and point to how power is often interpreted as the ability to exact compliance, exert force and compel obedience from others. It is this kind of power, Loomer claims, that produces, "intended or desired effects in our relationship to nature or other people" or in other words, "the capacity to influence, guide, adjust, manipulate, shape, control or transform the human or natural environment in order to advance one's own purposes".²⁹ Such theologians are helpful in pointing out that any stress on power to dominate or control ensures that power is defined in a certain way and has predominantly negative characteristics. Ogletree and Loomer give a useful overview of those characteristics as follows:

²⁸ Tomlin, *The Power of the Cross: Theology and the Death of Christ in Paul, Luther and Pascal*, 293.

²⁹ Loomer, "Two Kinds of Power," 173. See also Martyn Percy, *Power and the Church: Ecclesiology in an Age of Transition* (London: Cassell, 1998), 1. Other theologians who take a similar view include the Feminist theologians Hamar and Purvis. See Anna Karin Hamar, "Some Understandings of Power in Feminist Liberation Theologies," *Feminist Theology*, no. 12 (1996): 10; Sally B Purvis, *The Power of the Cross: Foundations for a Christian Feminist Ethic of Community* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 20.

First, this type of power involves some kind of dominance-submission relationship. To have power is to be able to dominate others and to be weak is to submit to the domination of those with power. Ogletree writes that we as human beings are always involved in the dominance-submission process in the sense that our relative strength or weakness is always being tested against that of others. The more power a person gains, the less another has and so power is something that we have to compete for. "How we fare in that competition has far-reaching consequences for how we share in the distribution of all the goods, services, privileges, opportunities, and honours a society has at its disposal."³⁰

Secondly, Loomer describes power as domination as unilateral, in that it is one-sided, abstract and non-relational. The aim of such power is to create the largest effect on the other while remaining minimally influenced by the other.³¹ The person influenced by the exercise of power is affected and altered by the relationship, while the person exercising power is largely unaffected by the process. The power relationship is unilateral because it focuses on the personal goals of individuals and not mutual relationships.

Thirdly, within the unilateral power relationship, our sense of self-worth and value is measured in terms of how much power we can possess and wield. Our strength and value is determined by how much power we can control and how much we can resist or overcome competing powers that conflict with our own. Consequently, for Loomer, any gain in power by the other, in this context, is a negative experience: it means a loss of power and by implication a loss of status and self-worth.³² Moreover, if the other is a threat to the realization of our purposes, then any influence from that other is a result of weakness and our own power inadequacy. Consequently, there is a compulsion to limit and control the power of others and to avoid any submission or passivity towards it.³³

Fourthly, power as unilateral involves the empowerment of the non-communal self. The self derives identity and meaning from itself and its ultimate fulfilment. Relationships in this process, and indeed society itself, are simply a means to fulfil the

³⁰ Thomas W Ogletree, "Power and Human Fulfilment," *Pastoral Psychology* 22, no. 216 (1971): 43.

³¹ Loomer, "Two Kinds of Power," 173.

³² *Ibid.*, 174.

³³ *Ibid.*, 174-175.

self and the other exists only as a means for the realization of the goals of the self.³⁴ Any dependency on the other or passivity are signs of weakness. Consequently, the strength of the self is derived from itself and not from the other or society.

Finally, power, as domination is not a meaningful end in itself but only the means to another end. It is simply an instrument for obtaining those things we believe we need for fulfilment and fullness of life. It is then “a means to status, prestige and honour within society”.³⁵

These conceptions of power are questioned and ultimately rejected by those theologians seeking to redefine power in a more positive and communally based light. Unilateral power is precisely the type of power that has dominated European thought, leading to the human anxieties and ideologies that I discussed earlier. Power, it is argued, needs to be redefined in order to help humanity deal with the questions and consequences generated by the marriage between science and unilateral power.³⁶

In addition, the association of church structures with that of dominant coercive power simply fuels the post-modern suspicion of Christianity being oppressive and unjust. Modern theological movements such as black, feminist and liberation theologies have all criticized church structures based on models of domination, as oppressive and largely incompatible with the Gospel. The feminist theologian Purvis, for example, describes power within the context of Christian theology as inherently oppressive and unjust. It is power as control, which assumes the superiority and greater entitlement of one or some over another or others. If Christians are committed to the conviction that God creates persons equally, power as control cannot function alongside such convictions without undermining them, leading to a deep and violent self-contradiction.³⁷

Webster writes that much theological work on power is fuelled by the conviction that Christology is foundational to Christian theology and offers a radical critique of “traditional” understandings of power, hence the dissatisfaction with “traditional”

³⁴ Ibid., 177.

³⁵ Ogletree, "Power and Human Fulfilment," 43.

³⁶ Loomer, "Two Kinds of Power," 183.

³⁷ Purvis, *The Power of the Cross: Foundations for a Christian Feminist Ethic of Community*, 20-21.

understandings of power as domination, and the search for a replacement that reveals new insights into God's "power" being a form of power in weakness.³⁸ It seems that dissatisfaction with the "power as domination" model stems from the implications of what that model means for God and the world and how humanity relates to both. Such implications lead to theological difficulties, and for some, theological distortions of God's power. Migliore, when assessing the theological implications of power, gives a useful overview of three of the most common distortions as follows:

3.1 God as Supreme Monarch

This view portrays God as being a supreme monarch or ruler whose power is absolute and omnipotent. God operates like a "world boss" or patriarchal figure that rules with arbitrary, coercive and totalitarian power.³⁹ In this picture, God and the church that speaks for (God) cannot be questioned and are made absolute instead. Such a view of God's tyrannical omnipotence can only lead to imagining the divine as being some kind of dictator who enforces divine will upon the world. Such a God does not inspire or promote love, service or obedience from humanity, but rather the opposite, resentment, fear and a desire to struggle or rebel against divine control. Moreover, worship of such a being may also encourage the worshipper to adopt the same dictatorial and authoritarian attitudes.⁴⁰

Apart from the sexist patriarchal connotations, it is this view of God and divine power that was ultimately challenged and rejected by the Enlightenment and modern society, in its effort to be free from controlling power. Migliore contends that, "If the church continues to employ the image of God as Father, the image must certainly be free of its patriarchal connotations. If the church continues to employ the image of God as Lord, the image must be clearly distinguished from dictatorship and bossism".⁴¹

³⁸ Webster, "Some Notes on the Theology of Power," 18.

³⁹ Migliore, *The Power of God*, 35.

⁴⁰ Gordon D Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981), 42.

⁴¹ Migliore, *The Power of God*, 36. A more detailed critique of the God as monarch model can be found in Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 63-69; Gordon D Kaufman, *Theology for a Nuclear Age* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1985); Sallie McFague, "Imaging a Theology of Nature: The World as God's Body," in *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology*, ed. Charles Birch, William Eakin, and Jay B McDaniel (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 208-211.

3.2 God as Captive Power

This view posits a concept of God who is somehow under our control. God is understood as a kind of business partner who enters into a contractual relationship with humanity, based on a system of merit. We are rewarded for our good deeds and for our correct performance of ritual. For Migliore, this kind of contractual/business arrangement with God fits well with the underlying principles of Western economic and social systems.⁴² This view can also treat God as a kind of magician who provides all that we ask for, whether health, good fortune, a new car, promotion at work and so on. God's power is manipulable and consequently manipulated to serve our own interests, be they political, economic, social or nationalistic.⁴³ Migliore argues that this amounts to humanity attempting to take God captive and compelling the divine to serve human interest. God is given human allegiance only to the extent that humanity gets something out of it, happiness or success for example, or only if God is seen to be on our side and upholding the values we espouse. "The captive God is our supreme genie, our personal or national champion."⁴⁴

3.3 God as Supreme Transcendence

In this view, God is the absolute and perfect reality existing in isolation from the world. The divine remains both above and outside the world, unconnected and totally unmoved by it. Consequently, God is interpreted as being apathetic and indifferent. Migliore suggests that the closest example of this view prevalent in modern society is "modern individualism", the ideal of a strong individual totally independent of others and deriving all power and value from within the self. This is a demonstration of unilateral power, a power in isolation of others.

The three theological strands that I select, all seek to suggest alternative models of God that avoid the distortions of divine power that Migliore identifies above and, by implication, redefines divine-human interaction and concepts of divine power operating in the world. I will therefore now explore each of these in turn.

⁴² Migliore, *The Power of God*, 36.

⁴³ See also Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God*, 43.

⁴⁴ Migliore, *The Power of God*, 37-38.

4. *Process Theology*

The first theological strand that I select is process theology which, by developing an understanding of God in process or essential relatedness to the world, posits an alternative interpretation of divine power and how it operates in relationship to others. It arose initially out of the work of process philosopher Alfred North Whitehead who, with a background in mathematics and philosophy of science, developed a philosophy of nature articulated in *Process and Reality* (1929).⁴⁵ His other works include *The Function of Reason* (1929), *Adventures of Ideas* (1933) and *Modes of Thought* (1938). Central to his philosophy is the idea that reality is not static and substantial but rather dynamic and in a state of process, so much so that “nothing is ever the same twice in succession”.⁴⁶ Reality in this process is made up of “actual entities” or “actual occasions” which are not tiny pieces of matter but rather more like moments of experience. These entities or occasions are always in transition and in the process of becoming something new.⁴⁷ They are able to exist in process because they possess a degree of freedom to develop and to be influenced by their surroundings.

While reality exists in a state of continual process and flux, this does not preclude some concept of permanence. For Whitehead, this permanence exists on two levels. The first is in what he calls “eternal objects” which exist in the temporal world and function rather like the ideal forms in Platonic thought in the sense that they do not actually exist on their own but rather within the actual entities within which they become concrete.⁴⁸ The second form of permanence exists on the non-temporal or eternal level found in the primordial nature of God.

God, in Whitehead’s thought, is dipolar, in that the divine comprises two contrasting poles, one being potential (primordial) and the other actual (consequent). The primordial refers to God’s eternal nature and the abstract attributes of God such as transcendence, absoluteness and immutability. As primordial, God is “the unlimited

⁴⁵ Norman L Geisler, "Process Theology," in *Tensions in Contemporary Theology*, ed. Stanley N Gundry and Alan F Johnson (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), 239.

⁴⁶ David L Smith, *A Handbook of Contemporary Theology: Tracing Trends & Discerning Directions in Today's Theological Landscape* (Wheaton, Illinois: BridgePoint, 1992), 152; Geisler, "Process Theology," 241.

⁴⁷ Carl E Braaten and Robert W Jenson, eds., *A Map of Twentieth Century Theology: Readings from Karl Barth to Radical Pluralism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 329.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

conceptual realization of the absolute wealth of potentiality”.⁴⁹ The eternal objects that Whitehead defines as existing within actual entities are indefinite and unordered potentials, which are ordered by God in his primordial nature. As Geisler puts it, “God in His primordial nature is like a backstage director who organizes and lines up the actors, making them “relevant” for their moment of “ingression” on the stage of the temporal world”.⁵⁰

The actual or consequent nature of God refers to the divine temporal nature and the concrete attributes of God such as immanence, contingency, finiteness and changeability. In a sense, the world is the consequent nature of God because it is a representation of God’s physical nature. Consequently, God and the world exist in a give-and-take relationship. The world contributes flux to God and is God, while God contributes permanence and order to the process of creativity and existence.⁵¹

This philosophical system was developed and elaborated by Charles Hartshorne, among others, into process thought and theology and subsequently developed into two particular strands of process thought. The first pioneered by Hartshorne and followed by theologians such as John Cobb and Schubert Ogden are rationalist. They argue from the position that reason can be used to probe *a priori* truth. Hartshorne, for example, defends dipolar theism with an appeal to reason and reconstruction of the ontological argument. The other strain, followed by Henry Nelson Wieman, Bernard Loomer and Bernard Meland, among others, is empirical, in that it appeals to, and makes use of, human experience.⁵² In both strands, however, the basic premise is that the world is a social organism both interdependent and interrelated and which is moving towards “its satisfaction through a network of mutual influences among which are the persuasive aims of God”.⁵³

⁴⁹ Donald W Sherburne, ed., *A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), 179.

⁵⁰ Geisler, "Process Theology," 246.

⁵¹ Smith, *A Handbook of Contemporary Theology: Tracing Trends & Discerning Directions in Today's Theological Landscape*, 153.

⁵² Geisler, "Process Theology," 250-251; Bernard M Loomer, "Process Theology: Origins, Strengths, Weaknesses," *Process Studies* 16, no. 4 (1987): 248-249; John B Cobb, *Process Theology as Political Theology*, First ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), 20. An examination of the leading figures of the empirical strand of process thought can be found in Randolph Crump Miller, ed., *Empirical Theology: A Handbook* (Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press, 1992).

⁵³ Paul S Fiddes, "Process Theology," in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, ed. Alister E McGrath (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1993), 472.

Pittenger, developing a definition of process thought from Crump, identifies six points that define process thought, and these are as follows:

(a) a way of looking at the world, concerned (b) with development and (c) an organic or a societal view of things, which also recognizes (d) that concepts or ideas are not unchangeable and finds (e) that human personality is a “becoming” rather than some static essence. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, he notes (f) that while such a conceptuality sees the world in movement, there is still genuine ‘continuity’ in the midst of flux.⁵⁴

Importantly, process theology conceives reality as a dynamic process and not a static happening and the guiding principle of that process is that things happen or are caused, not by forced coercion, but rather a process of influence and persuasion. Elements of reality interact and influence each other and God is the essential order or guiding process behind it. Crucially God is involved in the process which allows reality to evolve in a dynamic of creative freedom, love and self-determination. At the heart of reality is an essential relatedness, so God as reality is involved in constant relationship to the world as part of the essential relatedness of reality influencing and interacting with its components.

Consequently, process theology sees God quite differently from classical theism which defines the divine as being omnipotent and omniscient. Process theology views God as being essentially related to the world, involved in it, influencing, and being influenced by it. God can influence entities but is also influenced and changed by the experience of relating to them. Hartshorne argues that God’s nature is both unchanging and changeable, unchanging in the sense that, for example, God’s omnipotence is constant and will always know what is knowable, but also changeable in the sense that in process, new things are always happening and they become knowable.⁵⁵ In the act of process, the divine experience continues to be enriched by that process.

⁵⁴ Norman Pittenger, *The Lure of Divine Love: Human Experience and Christian Faith in a Process Perspective* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1979), 3.

⁵⁵ David Ray Griffin, "Process Theology," in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. Erwin Fahlbusch, et al. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B Eerdmans, 2005), 365; Ian G Barbour, "God's Power: A Process View," in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B Eerdmans, 2001), 13.

God's involvement with the world in process also means that as the guiding force behind it, God also keeps its rules, so that just as things happen not by forced coercion, but rather influence and persuasion, the same is true of God's divine power. God's omnipotence and omniscience are redefined here in that omnipotence does not mean that God can do anything. He cannot force others to do his will simply because the acts and events that make up reality are creative and self-determined. Similarly, in order for that reality to be truly creative and truly free then God does not know the future in its entirety. He may know the possibilities that are open to the beings involved, but not the exact path that they will choose. According to McGrath, process thought not only redefines omnipotence in terms of persuasion, but also understands omniscience as God's perfect knowledge of possibility and actuality. God here is perfect in his relation to all past and present actuality but is continually persuading and embracing newly emerging actuality that could not have been foreknown in detail.⁵⁶

God guides and influences the process and is involved in actualising and persuading realities to move towards the best possibility open to it, but the subject is not compelled to choose what God wants: it can, if it so wishes, choose another possibility.⁵⁷

Although this is an overly simplified description of process theology, it does at least highlight how divine power can be redefined and reformulated. Perhaps most significant is that it posits a definition of divine power which is inherently relational and empowering.⁵⁸ It is not a question of divine control or coercive determinism, but rather one of mutual enrichment, freedom and creativity and also of divine risk, of God having no ultimate control over the process. Process theologians such as Griffin, argue that God's power is essentially creative which evokes or persuades, not a unilateral power to stop, constrain or destroy.⁵⁹

Perhaps the greatest strength of process theology is its "solution" to the problem of theodicy. God is "absolved" from blame for both moral and natural evil because God is

⁵⁶ Fiddes, "Process Theology," 474.

⁵⁷ John B Cobb and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 53.

⁵⁸ Barbour, "God's Power: A Process View," 2.

⁵⁹ David Ray Griffin, *Evil Revisited: Responses and Reconsiderations* (New York: State University Of New York Press, 1991), 24.

not in total control of the process.⁶⁰ Keller argues that if God's power is redefined then the traditional questions theodicy poses over God's power in relation to suffering or evil are also transformed. While traditional theism seeks to discern God's will in every tragedy the result often being that God or the victim is blamed for that tragedy, process theology "moves the goalposts" and redefines the game. The question is no longer one of divine omnipotence or impotence, or success or failure, or win or lose, the divine power is different and so such questions become either a misunderstanding of the nature of that divine power or irrelevant.⁶¹

The question of theodicy then is neatly sidestepped, but at how high a price? McGrath argues that critics of process theology point to the apparent abandonment of divine transcendence and the stripping down of divine attributes, so that transcendence itself "may mean nothing more than that God outlives and surpasses other entities".⁶² However it does, as Ward notes, raise questions of and challenges to classical theism and over notions of divine attributes. It also takes seriously the reality of God's relationship to the world and the implications for divine action and interaction with it.⁶³ Essentially all process theology is relational at heart and God is both part of, and is, that relational process.

If God's activity to and in the world is defined in terms of a relational process, or relational power, then process theology enables us to rediscover a God who is open to the world's experience and profoundly affected by it. Suchocki argues that this results in a co-experiencing; God feels the world with us, and human beings can, in some limited way, feel the world with God. There is an invitation here for us to share in God and the divine love for the world which is an invitation into God's transforming love

⁶⁰ Alister E McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 227-228.

⁶¹ Catherine Keller, "Power Lines," in *Power, Powerlessness and the Divine: New Inquiries in Bible and Theology*, ed. Cynthia L Rigby (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1997), 70-71; John B Cobb, *God and the World*, Fourth ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), 90; Griffin, *Evil Revisited: Responses and Reconsiderations*, 24.

⁶² McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 228. McGrath dismisses process thought as an implausible construction, which may have alienated both Christian theologians and scientists alike from engaging in any further dialogue on a scientific theology. See for example McGrath, *A Scientific Theology vol. One: Nature* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001), 41.

⁶³ Loomer, "Process Theology: Origins, Strengths, Weaknesses," 250.

demonstrated in the cross and resurrection and which ultimately leads to a transformation of who we are as human beings.⁶⁴

If God in relationship is open to the world then it also reminds us that God is also engaged in the risk of relationship. God is at risk of rejection or ridicule if that relationship is rejected. This is, of course, precisely what happened to Jesus on the cross. The offer of divine relationship and love was rejected in favour of hatred and death. The cross represents the rejection and destruction of divine relationship to the world, yet the rejection of relationship leads to the creation of new relationships that can empower and create in quite unexpected ways. The rejection of God on the cross leads to the hope and new life of the resurrection and process theology reminds us that if God's relationship to the world is one of relational power, then it empowers not only at great risk to God who is profoundly involved in the process, but also in ways that we may not expect.

4.1 Loomer's Relational Power

A prominent theologian writing out of the process theology tradition is Bernard Loomer. His work is important to our discussion because he posits a concept of power as relational which has the potential to connect with concepts of relational power in Melanesia. At the heart of Loomer's thought is the conviction that relationship is central to process thought. He dislikes the term process theology because, he argues, it is not just about process. He prefers the term process/relational modes of thought because the primacy of relationships is just as important as the stress on process.⁶⁵

Loomer makes a distinction between two forms of power, one which is unilateral and measured by the ability to influence others, and the other which is relational and measured in terms of openness to others. Relational power relies on a redefinition of power away from the "traditional" perception of power producing an effect to that of the capacity to sustain a mutually internal relationship. Just as power is inherent in human life and existence, so too, Loomer argues, are the basic concepts of

⁶⁴ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 159-160; Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *God Christ Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 115.

⁶⁵ Loomer, "Process Theology: Origins, Strengths, Weaknesses," 245.

interrelatedness and interdependence. Human existence and reality are defined by our interconnected relationships to each other in that human beings do not become interdependent rather they are interdependent and bound up in the lives of others. It is a basic condition of life, whether we know it or not.⁶⁶ Openness to relationship and the influence of others allows for both the recognition of the other as an end, rather than the means to an end. It also allows the transformation of self existing only in isolation of the other, to being powerful only in relation to the other and the influence of the other.

When the self is defined in terms of relationality and community, the meaning of “self” and relationships are expanded and transformed to actualise the possibilities and potential of each individual in dynamic relationships to and for the other.⁶⁷ Within this relationship the process of influence and being influenced are closely intertwined to the extent of being almost indistinguishable from each other, so that receiving from a relationship becomes as important as giving. Power in this scheme is about having influence but also about allowing dependence on others to be part of the relationship. The giving and receiving of those in relationship cultivates the conditions for free creative power that feeds off each other, so for example Loomer suggests that listening allows the conditions for the speaker to talk, and also discloses part of the listener to the speaker. This results in a mutually creative process that allows for mutual self-revelation.⁶⁸

If power operates relationally, then relationships are sustained, not for domination, manipulation or control desired in unilateral power, but rather for mutual empowerment. The stronger relational power is, the stronger relationships become and the more openness becomes a possibility. While this allows for greater openness, creativity and potential for empowerment, there can also be considerable risk. Loomer claims that the ultimate symbol of this risk and the cost of maintaining an internal relationship in the Christian tradition is the cross.⁶⁹ Christ stands as the ultimate symbol of relational power, whose very being was involved in relationships with others, but his desire for mutual relationships to his people involved an essential openness and with it both

⁶⁶ Ibid., 251.

⁶⁷ Loomer, "Two Kinds of Power," 185.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 192.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 198.

vulnerability and risk. Christ's offer of mutual relationship and the opening up of himself for the world was met with rejection and death.

Loomer is not the only theologian to be redefining power in this way. Other examples include Poling who, working from a process perspective, also redefines power by situating it within the web of relationships that make up human life and existence. For Poling, our ability to act in effective ways depends on our relationships to others. Power is relational in the sense that "the relative amount of power we have is determined in relation to other persons".⁷⁰ Schmidt describes Poling as seeing power as "a manifestation of relational agendas which either move persons towards greater creativity and freedom or toward control and domination".⁷¹

Power, in this sense, is all about the sustaining of internal relationships, and increasing the power of the web of relationships as a whole. Both Loomer and Poling seek to formulate a concept of power that is not only covenantal in nature and affirms positive relationships between God and human beings, but also one that seeks to empower all those involved in the process. Guthrie, working on models of God for people recovering from addiction, identifies power and how we define it as a critical issue in the process. "Power over", she writes, is familiar to shame based persons; "power with" on the other hand, moves from seeing power as essentially coercive to being about empowerment and enablement. It is a move from manipulation to affirmation.⁷²

The stress on relational power leads to a questioning and critiquing of traditional European conceptions of power and a move away from power as domination to a communal sense of power based on mutual relationships. This is important for my discussion in Melanesia because concepts of interconnecting relationships, power existing in relationships and the identity of individuals being bound up in them, exist across Melanesian worldviews and theologies. Yet often these are relationships that exist as a means to an end, to acquire power success or status. It may be then that process theology, with its stress on concepts of God's essential relatedness to the world, being dependent upon it for actuality, and as constantly developing and improving as

⁷⁰ Poling, *The Abuse of Power: A Theological Problem*, 24.

⁷¹ Schmidt, "Power as Theological Problem," 71.

⁷² Kathryn Guthrie, "Models of God: Empowerment, Intimacy, Hope," *Ibid.* 47 (1993): 27.

part of that relationship, can offer Melanesian theology a way of seeing God as or in a relational process of both great creativity, openness and risk.⁷³ Loomer's stress on relational power may also be useful in both affirming relational processes in Melanesia yet also challenging the motivation for establishing them in the first place. Are relationships a means to an end to acquire power, or an end in themselves, in that relationships of mutual influence and openness are power?

5. Feminist Theology

Feminist theology as the second theological strand selected, also focuses on concepts of relational power and particularly on the responsibilities of human beings towards God and each other within them. Importantly some feminist theologians focus on the importance of right relationship and the reality and consequences of sin as the breaking of this essential relatedness to God and to each other. It is the stress on right relationship and the consequences of sin breaking them that may have relevance for concepts of right relationship existing within Melanesia.

Feminist theology arose out of the recognition that the experience and contribution of women in Christian thought and tradition had been largely ignored and suppressed. Consequently, feminist theologians have been primarily concerned with the recovery of those lost voices and encouraging and listening to female contributions to contemporary theology.⁷⁴ Female experience then, is a major source of feminist theological reflection and, argues Ruether, "...explodes as a critical force, exposing classical theology, including its codified traditions, as based on *male* experience rather than on universal human experience".⁷⁵ If the female contribution to Christian tradition and theology is recognized then it effects a paradigm shift in theology where all previous methods, beliefs and values may (a) be critiqued from the perspective of women, (b) be revealed as primarily patriarchal theories and (c) be reconstructed or transformed by the experience of women. This allows for much more creative and innovative ways of doing theology, which enrich and transform theological debate. Hogan, therefore,

⁷³ Keith Ward, "The Concept of God," in *Companion Encyclopedia of Theology*, ed. Peter Byrne and Leslie Houlden (London: Routledge, 1995), 363.

⁷⁴ Lynn Japinga, *Feminism and Christianity: An Essential Guide*, Abingdon Essential Guides (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 15-17.

⁷⁵ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1983), 13.

defines feminist theology as a critical, contextual and creative re-reading and re-writing of Christian theology in which female experience and perspectives are recognized as relevant to theological reflection.⁷⁶

5.1 Feminist Critique of Power

A particular area often critiqued by feminist theologians is that of power and its application. According to Houlden, feminist theology has worked on denying the premise that “power is an attribute of God or at least it is of no primary value”.⁷⁷ The reason for this stems from the feminist theologians’ identification of power as primarily a male symbol, one which has come to mean control and domination above all else. Feminist theologians such as Hampson are critical of the “traditional” Judeo Christian concept of God’s powerfulness which portrays the divine as not only perfect but also separate, different and alone, in other words it is a power without relationship.⁷⁸ The question here is not only how such a God can care for reality without relationship, but also if God can be perfect without relationship, then, by implication, human relationships are of little value to the divine who exists without them.⁷⁹

In addition, feminist theologians have challenged traditional notions of “rationality” and “autonomy” being the highest qualities of human nature and which all human beings should strive for.⁸⁰ They are considered, instead, to be only one part of human life and need to be balanced by an emphasis on human relationships and emotion.⁸¹ Consequently, there is a stress on the profoundly relational nature of human existence and the recovery of the female experience and essence to enrich it. Relational power and its application within feminist theology are important themes, which lead to a

⁷⁶ Natalie K Watson, *Feminist Theology*, ed. Sally Bruyneel, et al., Guides to Theology (Michigan: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 2-3.

⁷⁷ Leslie Houlden, "Power," in *Jesus in History, Thought and Culture: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Leslie Houlden (Santa Barbara: ABC and Clio, 2003), 697.

⁷⁸ Daphne Hampson, "On Power and Gender," in *Christian Perspectives on Sexuality and Gender*, ed. Adrian Thatcher and Elizabeth Stuart (Leominster: Gracewing, 1996); Anne Spalding, "'Right Relation' Revisited: Implications of Right Relation in the Practice of Church and Christian Perceptions of God," *Feminist Theology*, no. 28 (2001): 62-63.

⁷⁹ Spalding, "'Right Relation' Revisited: Implications of Right Relation in the Practice of Church and Christian Perceptions of God," 62.

⁸⁰ Susan A Ross, "The Women's Movement and Theology in the Twentieth Century," in *The Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview*, ed. Gregory Baum (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 193; Loomer, "Two Kinds of Power," 173.

⁸¹ Ross, "The Women's Movement and Theology in the Twentieth Century," 193.

redefinition of power from “power over” and coercion, to “power with”, or “power to”, signified by mutuality and reciprocity.⁸²

Another important development is where theologians such as Ruether have traced how traditional patriarchal understandings of humanity have not only stressed the importance of reason over emotion but also a mind/body dualism that underpins Christian thought. The superiority of the soul over the corrupting influence of the body is expressed in various mind/body, male/female, black/white and reason/emotion dualisms, to such an extent that being male becomes associated with reason and female with being more sexual, physical and emotional beings whom the rational male must control.⁸³

Consequently, argues Ruether, connections are made between mind/body dualisms and negative attitudes towards women.⁸⁴ Such a focus enables feminist theologians to argue for a more positive examination of the body and human passions as avenues to encounter God. One prominent example is Carter Heyward who constructs a theology of power based on an understanding of the erotic.

At the heart of Carter Heyward’s theology is the view that God is relational power and that power can be born in us and realized in our lives but not manipulated to our ends or else it becomes something else besides God. This power is life and God is the power that humanity can exercise to “love one another into being”.⁸⁵ Power here means to love and be loved, yet, the “power” of mutual relationships needs to be recognized and trusted to be power. For Carter Heyward, this is often not the case as we continue to believe that power to control is in fact “real power” but as Harrison argues, this power to love is indeed both awful and awesome truth because it is through acts of love or lovelessness that we can create or destroy each other. The choice, she argues, is ours:

⁸² Hamar, "Some Understandings of Power in Feminist Liberation Theologies," 17.

⁸³ Ross, "The Women's Movement and Theology in the Twentieth Century," 194; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (East Malvern: Dove Communications, 1975), 14; Lois K Daly, "Ecofeminism, Reverence for Life, and Feminist Theological Ethics," in *Feminist Theological Ethics: A Reader*, ed. Lois K Daly (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 296-297.

⁸⁴ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Western Religious Tradition and Violence against Women in the Home," in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, ed. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R Bohn (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1989), 32-33; Beverly Wildung Harrison, "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love: Christian Ethics for Women and Other Strangers," in *Feminist Theology: A Reader*, ed. Ann Loades (London: SPCK, 1990), 204.

⁸⁵ Purvis, *The Power of the Cross: Foundations for a Christian Feminist Ethic of Community*, 40-41.

we can choose to set free the power of God's love in the world or we can choose to deprive others of it by withholding the very basis of personhood and community.⁸⁶

If God is relational power, then sin and evil in this schema are the violation and destruction of relationship. If "power" is to love and be loved in mutual relationship, then sin is the refusal to accept essential human connectedness and basic mutuality and reciprocity. For Carter Heyward, sin is "wrong relation" which leads not only to the denial of basic human relationships and connectedness but also the use and abuse of power as domination. Patriarchy here is the primary expression of sin because it consists of two aspects of "wrong relation". The first is the use of power as domination and abuse, and the second is its reliance on damaging dualisms that fracture connectedness, be it mind versus body; self versus other or individual versus community.⁸⁷

Carter Heyward argues that access to God's relational power comes through our eroticism and sensuality. By this she means more than sexuality, but rather "our ability and our need to touch one another and be touched".⁸⁸ Eroticism, here, is physical, spiritual and encompasses the holistic nature of human experience.⁸⁹

It is this experience of relational power through eroticism that is the basis of our knowledge and love of God.⁹⁰ It is also a theology of power that shakes the traditional forms of dualism in Christian thought which keep mind, body, physical and spiritual separate by insisting on a holistic understanding of what relationships are and how they function. It also gives a positive voice to sensual, erotic and sexual expression as a means to encounter God.⁹¹

Yet, such a radical theology of relational power is not without criticism. If God is relational power as Carter Heyward suggests, then it is a God who relies on humanity

⁸⁶ Harrison, "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love: Christian Ethics for Women and Other Strangers," 203.

⁸⁷ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1998), 225-226.

⁸⁸ Purvis, *The Power of the Cross: Foundations for a Christian Feminist Ethic of Community*, 42.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁹⁰ Carter Heyward, *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 99.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*; Purvis, *The Power of the Cross: Foundations for a Christian Feminist Ethic of Community*, 43.

for that power to be effected. In *The Redemption of God* she describes God as “no one” but rather a transpersonal spirit who is power in relation, but who relies on humanity to apply such power and make God active in human relationships. Consequently, if relational power and, by implication, God, is rejected, then God ceases to be. Spalding is critical here because it appears that in the loss of mutual relationships, either through death or the rejection of relationship, and when God is needed the most, Carter Heyward’s God is non-existent. Such a God has much less impact in the world than humans who continue to affect each other irrespective of whether they are in right relationship or not.⁹² The question remains whether this is enough. Carter Heyward’s mutual relation theology rejects any concept of God as either transcendent or omnipotent and maintains instead that God needs to be redeemed from such an understanding by human beings who effect God’s relational power in the world.⁹³ Yet here, as in process theology, we see the stripping away of divine attributes to the extent that God can only function as God if human beings allow the divine power to operate through them.

Nevertheless, relational power is central to Carter Heyward’s work and such a theology of mutual relation allows for recognition of the importance of relationships and the possibility of a holistic rather than dualistic understanding of human life and reality.

This stress on relational power is not exclusive to Carter Heyward however, but is rather a central concern of other feminist theologians and feminist theology in general.⁹⁴ For example, Grey has developed a theology of Christian redemption as “right relation” and a theology of revelation as “connectedness”. God as the relational power of the universe empowers this process.⁹⁵ Russell speaks in terms of a “partnership” between human beings and God by which she means a multiplicity of relationships that lead to genuine

⁹² Spalding, "'Right Relation' Revisited: Implications of Right Relation in the Practice of Church and Christian Perceptions of God," 63.

⁹³ Lucy Tatman, *Knowledge That Matters: A Feminist Theological Paradigm and Epistemology* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2001), 193.

⁹⁴ See for example Adrian Thatcher and Elizabeth Stuart, eds., *Christian Perspectives on Sexuality and Gender* (Leominster: Gracewing, 1996). Especially the section on Power and Relation, 121-167.

⁹⁵ See Mary Grey, *Redeeming the Dream: Feminism, Redemption and Christian Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1989); Mary Grey, *The Wisdom of Fools? Seeking Revelation for Today* (London: SPCK, 1993); Mary Grey, "Claiming Power-in-Relation: Exploring the Ethics of Connection," in *Christian Perspectives on Sexuality and Gender*, ed. Adrian Thatcher and Elizabeth Stuart (Leominster: Gracewing, 1996), 141-151.

mutuality with all.⁹⁶ Keller criticizes the very nature of self and separation arguing instead that feminism speaks spider language, in that it sees the world as an interconnected web and works from the hermeneutics of connectedness. Her book *From a Broken Web* is all about affirming this interconnectedness.⁹⁷ Hamar in her examination of concepts of power in feminist theology lists various descriptions of power that various theologians use. Examples include mutual empowerment, erotic power, creation-centred power, liberation-centred power, cosmological power, life-giving power, creative power, power in relation and so on. All of these involve relationship, mutuality and reciprocity in some form or another.⁹⁸

Yet Ackerman also reminds us that such theologies, which attempt to critique and redefine power, also need to take into account the complexity of defining power itself. Power can take many forms including power over, power to, power for, power with and is interconnected to concepts such as knowledge, love, difference, violence, resistance and embodiment.⁹⁹ When power is defined only in terms of one of these facets then it misses the complexity of power itself. If, for example, power is defined purely as domination, which is destructive, then it is in conflict with any understanding of God who is powerful and redeems creation through divine power. To reject power as domination in any form runs the risk of denying or at least watering down God's dominating "power" in creation.

Similarly if power is simplistically defined in terms of "power over" being negative and "power to" being positive, then it is unrealistic in life. For example, a parent may have power over a child and that may not necessarily be bad but for the good of the child. Power over and power to also cannot be simplistically reduced to gender alone either. Power over is not necessarily exclusively male, because women too can have power over another, as can men. Similarly, "power to" cannot also be considered as exclusively female.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ See for example Letty M Russell, *The Future of Partnership* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1979); Letty M Russell, *Growth in Partnership* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981); Ruether, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History*, 214.

⁹⁷ Catherine Keller, *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and Self* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 217-218.

⁹⁸ Hamar, "Some Understandings of Power in Feminist Liberation Theologies," 17.

⁹⁹ Denise M Ackerman, "Power," in *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, ed. Letty M Russell and J Shannon Clarkson (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 220.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 220-221.

The point here is that feminist theology in its critique of power is dealing with a multifaceted concept that defies an easy definition, hence, one of the tasks that it has set for itself, namely the transformation or redefinition of power relations is an ongoing and complex one.

5.2 Feminist Theology and Process Theology

It seems apparent that there are significant similarities between both feminist theology and process theology on various levels. Isherwood and McEwan, for example note important points of agreement between the two including first, that both feminist and process theology make experience a central category. Secondly, both describe a world that is constantly evolving and never perfect, that undermines the stereotype that women were responsible for the fall and the creation of chaos in God's ordered world. Thirdly, process theology refers to God and the world in mutual relation, a theme again developed in feminist theology.¹⁰¹ They go on to describe process theology as enabling women "to experience a living and moving God once more, rather than the fossilized, absolute God of patriarchal religion".¹⁰²

It is noticeable that some feminist theologians use process thought for their theologies. Grey for example uses process categories as a central framework for her feminist theology of redemption and Keller's work on self and separation relies heavily on the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. Both Livezey and Howell argue for a closer working together of feminist and process theology, either in developing a political feminist process theology or using Whiteheadian thought in constructing a post-patriarchal process-relational philosophy respectively.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Lisa Isherwood and Dorothea McEwan, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, Second ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 83-84; Tatman, *Knowledge That Matters: A Feminist Theological Paradigm and Epistemology*, 56-60.

¹⁰² Isherwood and McEwan, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 85. Tatman describes feminist theology as the inheritor of the scientific developments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and in particular, the feminist theological paradigm relies on the metaphysical presuppositions of independent relationality, a concept first developed in process thought. See Tatman, *Knowledge That Matters: A Feminist Theological Paradigm and Epistemology*, 56.

¹⁰³ See Grey, *Redeeming the Dream: Feminism, Redemption and Christian Tradition*, 31-38; Grey, *The Wisdom of Fools? Seeking Revelation for Today*, 74; Keller, *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and Self*, 182-202, 210-212; Lois Gehr Livezey, "Women, Power, and Politics: Feminist Theology in Process Perspective," *Process Studies* 17, no. 2 (1988); Nancy R Howell, "The Promise of a Process Feminist Theory of Relations," *Process Studies* 17, no. 2 (1988): 78-87.

While much feminist theology has developed out of contextual theologies of liberation, process thought has provided it with a philosophy that compliments the importance of process, experience and mutual relations and allows for a redefinition of relationships and power within them.

6. Liberation Theology

The third strand I select is liberation theology which often stresses how power can operate negatively as a destructive force to dominate or control. Such power runs contrary to that of God who, by virtue of being a God of life, confronts destructive power and transforms it from being life-denying to life-giving.

Although to some extent all theology can be described as contextual, liberation theology is one of the earliest and most influential theologies in the 20th century that places context as central in its methodology. Developing out of the experience of the large-scale poverty, injustice and political instability of the Latin American continent during the 1950s and 1960s, liberation theologians such as Gutiérrez spoke of doing theology from the underside of history.¹⁰⁴ In other words from the perspective of the poor and suffering and then locating and transforming the political and social structures that continue to oppress them. Transformation could occur when Christ's preferential option for the poor was realized and liberation, which it was claimed was central to the biblical message, was taken seriously and made a reality.¹⁰⁵

The implication of this theological method is that the context and experience of the poor is essential: it is the lens through which all theology and theological concepts are interpreted. Furthermore, such a theology relies on a particular hermeneutic of Christian scripture and tradition. Here both scripture and tradition are not to be interpreted in the abstract, but on the basis of a specific political and social context and interpreted through the use of socio-analytical tools or the social sciences. This theology begins

¹⁰⁴ For a detailed account of Latin American history and its relationship to liberation theology see for example E Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, vol. 3, Liberation and Theology (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985). And Alfred T Hennelly, ed., *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990).

¹⁰⁵ Liberation theologians see "liberation" as a central concept in the biblical message and make use of stories such as the Exodus from Egypt, Jesus use of Isaiah 61 in Luke 4:18-21 and Mary's Magnificat in Luke 1: 52-53 to justify it. See for example Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1973), 157-158.

with a particular social situation and the specific questions it raises. These are then applied to a theological subject such as “revelation” and the contextual questions are then directly addressed. As a result “revelation” provides a response, which illuminates the individual and social situation of the person putting the questions.¹⁰⁶ This stands in complete contrast to the usual function of academic theology, which deduces a response from “revelation” as a concept and then applies it universally to the human situation.

6.1 Liberation Theology and Power

Power in liberation theology largely has a negative connotation, particularly when it is associated with socio-political structures that reinforce poverty. If liberation of the oppressed is the goal, then the existing power structures that continue to oppress must be confronted and transformed. Liberation theologians are known for making the connection between political and social structures and the presence of sin within them. Sin in this sense is more than simply an individual interior reality but a concrete and historical fact, evident in the social structures that continue to oppress the poor.¹⁰⁷ Consequently liberation theology is essentially in confrontation with unjust power. Comblin, for example, describes the situation in Latin America as “the power of the Church against the forces of evil”.¹⁰⁸ Here the true power or reality of the Church is bound up in its defence and liberation of the poor and oppressed. For Comblin, this is a straight fight between the oppressors, (those who hold and perpetrate unjust power), and the power of Christ in the church who stands and struggles against them.¹⁰⁹ Yet this distinction is not always so clear-cut. Liberation theologians have also criticized church

¹⁰⁶ Rosino Gibellini, *The Liberation Theology Debate*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1987), 10-11.

¹⁰⁷ Liberation theology is often criticized for reducing sin to socio-political context, yet Gutiérrez has worked hard to refute that claim. Sin has an individual, spiritual and social dimension and cannot be overcome by socio-political liberation alone. Likewise liberation is a concept that goes beyond being simply socio-political but touches all aspects of reality. The final defeat of sin and the reality of a total liberation can only be realized by God in the world to come and not by human beings. See for example Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1986), 133-137.

¹⁰⁸ Joseph Comblin, "The Power of the Church and the Powers of Evil: The Case of Latin America," in *Power in the Church*, ed. James Provost and Knut Walf, *Concilium* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 106.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

structures that have reinforced, legitimised or supported unjust political structures or regimes and so abused its position and power.¹¹⁰

6.2 Christ As Liberator

The image of Christ as liberator is a potent one that this type of theology utilizes. Boff, for example, constructs a Christology based on an understanding of God's liberating power. The cross and crucifixion of Christ are interpreted as the result of every process of liberation where the powers of oppression have gained an upper hand. The only possible outcome in this situation is martyrdom and sacrifice, a path that Jesus was prepared to take.¹¹¹ The resurrection on the other hand is the sure sign of the triumph of life over death and its unlimited potential. It, for Boff, "points to the goal and fulfilment sought by every liberation process: arrival at complete freedom".¹¹² Here then the death and resurrection of Christ is identified with all who are involved in the struggle for liberation which becomes concrete in the lives of all who stand against those powers that oppress or destroy.

Crucial to Boff's thought here is Christ's use of power. It is not invoked to impose the will of God because this would take away freedom and enforce domination. If the Kingdom of God were forced into being through violence it would make humanity mere beneficiaries of God's work. God's power however is not about domination but rather freedom and liberation and this is the model for humanity to follow. Human beings are not simply beneficiaries but are also called to a liberating task as active subjects of God's personal and social transformation in the world. Power here must be about liberation and not domination.¹¹³

This interpretation of power is developed in his most controversial work, *Church Charism and Power*, where the institutional dominating power of the church is heavily criticized in favour of a complete re-reading of Christian faith and tradition. It is, for

¹¹⁰ See for example Leonardo Boff, *Church Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1985). Particularly Chapter 4: The Violation Of Human Rights In The Church and Chapter 5: The Power Of The Institutional Church: Can It Be Converted?

¹¹¹ Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for Our Time* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1981), 288-289.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 291.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

Boff, only when we can read, “no longer with the eyes of those with power but with the eyes of all who have abandoned the perspective of power”, that we can gain a true understanding of what God’s power is all about.¹¹⁴ Boff continues:

Jesus did not preach the Church but rather the Kingdom of God that included liberation for the poor, comfort for those who cry, justice, peace, forgiveness and love. He did not proclaim an established order; he did not call others to be rulers but to be submissive, humble, and loyal. He liberates for freedom and love that allow one to be submissive yet free, critical, and loyal without being servile, that call those in power to be servants and brothers free from the appetite for greater power.¹¹⁵

Here Christ’s power is identified not as domination but as the power to love. Boff’s views here spring out of the tension that he saw between the development of base ecclesial communities at the grassroots of the population on the one hand and the institutional church on the other, the result being a need to develop a new way of thinking about “church”. Base ecclesial communities were effectively small groups of Catholics, coordinated by lay leaders who met regularly for worship and communal reflection. This gave people, at the grass roots of society, the opportunity to reflect biblically and theologically on the issues they faced in their specific context.¹¹⁶

This new way of seeing and interpreting church is also identified by Richard who, following Comblin, also sees the liberationist relationship to power as confrontational. Yet, the conflict is not between belief and non-belief in God but rather faith and idolatry. In a context where the majority of people are Christian, non-belief is not really an issue, so consequently liberation theology often stresses how Christianity can be perverted into an ideology of power that dominates.¹¹⁷ Latin American history is then invoked to support such an assertion. For example the often brutal colonialization of the Conquistadors in the sixteenth century was carried out in the name of God; those responsible for slavery were Christians supported by European Christian nations; and the more recent military dictators responsible for the oppression of their own nations often claim to be Christians. As a result, Richard claims that the main theological

¹¹⁴ Boff, *Church Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church*, 59.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ See for example Marcello de C Azevedo, "Basic Ecclesial Communities," in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, ed. Ignacio Ellacuria and Jon Sobrino (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 638-640.

¹¹⁷ Pablo Richard, "Theology in the Theology of Liberation," *Ibid.* (1993), 154-160.

undertaking for liberation theology is not in establishing the existence of God but rather unmasking ideologies of dominating power that are nothing more than idolatries and false gods. It is a question of determining what God it is in whom we believe and how the divine is present in the concrete reality of the poor and oppressed in Latin America.¹¹⁸ Here idolatry has an historical concrete dimension, which exists in the various social systems and structures that endorse oppression. When the God of life confronts such death-dealing ideology it becomes a confrontation between liberation and oppression, an inevitable struggle between the forces of life and death.¹¹⁹

This is also a theme in the writing of Sobrino who argues that Christ in his ministry, life and death is defending a God of life as and against the false divinities of a god of death. Jesus' various arguments and controversies with the ruling elite and religious leaders is simply a struggle between the God of life against the false ideologies that create oppression and bring death. For Sobrino, Christ died because he unmasked the false ideologies of God as death-giving rather than life-giving and was killed as a result.¹²⁰ Yet Bravo reminds us that it is God who gives life and, when faced with the death of Christ, continues to choose it. God does not repay death with death, but rather the resurrection is the confirmation of life. Again, like other writers, Bravo sees power as essentially negative as it becomes murderous by suppressing the rights of those it dominates. Hence he argues that "power" is in opposition to God's Kingdom and Jesus' response to it is servanthood toward the other.¹²¹

Liberation theology has evolved from the roots up, and has come to represent the experiences and perspective of the most powerless in society as and against the

¹¹⁸ Ibid. See also Phillip Berryman, *Liberation Theology: The Essential Facts About the Revolutionary Movement in Latin America and Beyond* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), 152-153. A statement from The Third Annual conference of the Latin American Bishops at Puebla also equates absolute power and wealth with idolatry. See for example The Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops, "Evangelization in Latin America's Present and Future (January 27-February 13, 1979)," in *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*, ed. Hennelly Alfred T (New York Orbis Books, 1990), 236-238.

¹¹⁹ Pablo Richard, "Theology in the Theology of Liberation," in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, ed. Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 159-160.

¹²⁰ See Jon Sobrino, "The Epiphany of the God of Life in Jesus of Nazareth," in *The Idols of Death and the God of Life: A Theology*, ed. Pablo Richard (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1983), 70, 90-91. See also Berryman, *Liberation Theology: The Essential Facts About the Revolutionary Movement in Latin America and Beyond*, 152-154. And Deane William Ferm, *Third World Liberation Theologies: An Introductory Survey* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 43.

¹²¹ Carlos Bravo, "Jesus of Nazareth, Christ the Liberator," in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, ed. Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 427-428, 436-437.

powerful elite. Power as domination is often equated with being an idolatry which promotes death as opposed to God's gift of life. These key concepts of liberation and life as and against oppression, idolatry and death have inspired the development of various liberationist theologies including black, feminist and womanist theologies across contexts and cultures. The recognition of oppression in its various forms, whether political, racist, or patriarchal that emerge from human context and experience has led to theologies which seek to challenge forms of domination and oppression and work out a liberationist response. Relational power then for example is a concept that has emerged to challenge traditional forms of power and domination. If liberation and the promotion of life are central to liberation theologies and if that is being worked out in the context of relationship, then these are concepts that have significance for Melanesian cultures that stress life, community and relationship. Life is at the heart of Melanesian worldviews and if Christ in Melanesia is about a God of life who gives life to Melanesians, then notions of community, relationships and power will be touched and transformed by that life.

7. *Divine Powerlessness*

The theological strands I have selected all deal with either a redefinition of, or confrontation with, power, yet how does this relate to concepts of God's power or more specifically Christ's death and resurrection on the cross? Webster has already alluded to how Christology offers a way not only to critique traditional views of power but also to develop a notion of "power in weakness", divine powerlessness and divine kenosis.¹²²

Consequently, theologians looking to redefine power often focus on Christ and his treatment and transformation of power.¹²³ For example, the key to Leech's view of divine power comes in his examination of the temptations of Jesus. All three temptations, he contends, were a call to accept power. The first, turning stones into bread, was the temptation to acquire both economic and material power. The second, to cast himself down, was the temptation to assert spiritual power or to perform miracles to use his spiritual power "to attract support and devotion and to manipulate people, to be

¹²² Webster, "Some Notes on the Theology of Power," 18.

¹²³ I discuss briefly here the theologies of Leech, Williams and Percy. It would be interesting to develop this tradition of kenotic Anglican theology in relation to the Anglican Melanesian Mission, but to do so here would take me beyond the scope of the thesis.

a wonder worker”.¹²⁴ The third temptation was that of acquiring political power in exchange for idolatrous worship. In all three examples, Jesus was tempted to accept power as a personal possession, which he rejects. Instead, Leech suggests, he offers that power, through his ministry, death and resurrection, to the community, the community of the body of Christ. As he explains:

So instead of turning stones into bread, Jesus created a eucharistic community which offered bread for the world. Instead of performing a miracle, a spectacular display of power, he created a community of spiritual power. And instead of seeking a dictatorial imperialism, he created a community committed to values of equality and sharing to work as a subversive and transforming, force within the structures of worldly power.¹²⁵

Power, then, is not claimed by Christ but transformed and given away to create and empower God’s people in community. Leech describes Christ as “the exact opposite of Humpty Dumpty”, for not only is his life broken and smashed on the cross but it is put together again in the resurrection. This putting back together incorporates and includes God’s people who become the body of Christ.¹²⁶ Salvation involves a participation in the new community that Christ’s brokenness and resurrection creates. Here Christ’s power is such that it empowers and creates community. It is a power given and poured out for others and not wielded as a personal possession for individual self-gratification and empowerment.

Williams suggests that Jesus’ creation of a new community indicates his refusal to accept or belong in that of the old. Jesus is not at home or at peace in the world; on the contrary, that world attempts to destroy him, yet his homelessness creates a new world for others.¹²⁷ The refusal of personal power and its subsequent transformation is also a refusal to accept the way things are and instead to create something new.

A similar theme can be seen in Percy who, in his examination of Jesus’ use of miracles and power, argues that an essential part of Jesus’ healing ministry was his taking on of

¹²⁴ Kenneth Leech, *We Preach Christ Crucified: The Proclamation of the Cross in a Dark Age* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1994), 15.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹²⁷ Rowan Williams, *The Truce of God* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 81.

affliction. The healing of Jesus involves touching and in the context of first century Judaism, by implication, the taking on of that impurity. For example, the touching and healing of the haemorrhaging woman and raising of Jairus' daughter both result in Jesus' defilement under Jewish law, as touching or being touched by a menstruating woman and a corpse would result in a state of uncleanness.¹²⁸ In addition, Jesus' willingness to frequent and eat with sinners is also a willingness to take on the social ostracization and brokenness and to challenge the social taboos of society. Here Percy makes the connection between the crucified Christ and the Christ of healing miracles. Christ on the cross is the ultimate fulfilment of his healing ministry because it is there that he takes on the afflictions of the world and gives himself to it. In his healing miracles, Jesus is prepared to take on the pain of others on the cross. He pays the ultimate price and is broken as a result.

The key for Percy in understanding God's power in the taking on of affliction and the giving of himself to the world is the kenotic self-limitation of Christ who appealed to human beings but did not compel them to follow him. His power is revealed in "paraenesis", the ability to appeal, reason, exhort or persuade. Paraenetic appeal is, for Percy, a valid way of exercising power and more so because "its model is the God who gave himself voluntarily for humanity and who invited from humanity both the response of faith and so an imitatio of that voluntary self-giving".¹²⁹

Paraenetic appeal is, paradoxically, a form of power and powerlessness. Choosing to exercise power other than by force, and to appeal rather than demand, are forms of powerlessness because they invite the possibility of risk, vulnerability and suffering. It is the powerlessness, which arises from choosing to be rejected or to suffer, rather than to impose one's will upon others.¹³⁰ This, Percy argues, is exactly what God does in laying aside divine power to appeal rather than force, and demonstrates the centre of divine power by doing so. Following Paul, Percy points to how human wisdom demands either signs or wonders or some kind of power demonstration or "sophisticated philosophical deliberation" precisely because human wisdom and the search for power are very different from how divine power operates. At the heart of the human desire for

¹²⁸ See for example Luke 8:40-56, Mark 5: 21-43 and Matthew 9: 18-34.

¹²⁹ Percy, *Power and the Church: Ecclesiology in an Age of Transition*, 46.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

power is the exploitation and perversion of power into something which controls, oppresses and crushes the weak; it is the desire to control rather than to appeal. Christ's "power" on the other hand is the power that brings life and health; it is life-giving rather than life-controlling. Participating in, and receiving, divine power therefore involves a transformation of power and a participation in divine weakness exemplified by the cross. It is a power that reveals "divine wisdom", one that is at odds with human notions of power, and also one that invites participation in the very nature and being of God. It is this power, which can bring restoration, reconstitution, healing and the end of alienation to the world.¹³¹

God's use of power then is fundamentally at odds with that of the world and Christ brings salvation, not by forcing his will upon others, nor by clinging to power at all costs, but rather by disowning and ultimately transforming it.

There are significant implications for Christ's followers in the taking up of the cross, precisely because it is difficult to accept that voluntary self-limitation is the path of true wisdom and power. Rather, Percy argues, through human eyes, such self-limitation is a demonstration of weakness or impotence to be avoided at all costs. Often there is an attempt to make divine power conform to human notions and expectations in which Christian ministry can become a means to acquire and exercise power over the other. Yet this puts it at odds with the experience of the cross and Percy states quite bluntly, that models of ministry built on the exercise of power which compels, punishes and bullies, will distort and pervert both the Gospel and the life and presence of God.¹³²

Tomlin, like Percy, argues that the realization of one's own powerlessness is the path to recognizing "true" power because it involves the surrendering of human power, the ability to relinquish rights or privileges for the sake of another. Only when power is given up can the power of the cross be grasped.¹³³ Tomlin points to the paradoxical nature of God's power; it is only in the giving up of power that God's power can be revealed. It is only in the relinquishing of power that its very nature can be transformed

¹³¹ Ibid., 53.

¹³² Ibid., 55.

¹³³ Tomlin, *The Power of the Cross: Theology and the Death of Christ in Paul, Luther and Pascal*, 281, 298.

from one which dominates and controls to one which enables, loves and releases.¹³⁴ For Tomlin, power expressed in the cross is not power over others, but rather power and ability to love. It is this power that creates and transforms communities that are built, not on relationships based on power to control or dominate which in turn may well promote division and oppression, but rather on relationships where power and privilege are at the service of others.¹³⁵

Nouwen's treatment of power is important here because he identifies Christ's power as being of a different nature to other concepts of power. Power in its most basic form does not invite intimacy; rather, people with power tend to be feared, looked up to and envied. Yet, Nouwen notes that Christ was none of these. While Christians continue to pray to an Almighty and powerful God, all might and power is absent from the one who reveals God, a man whose life was wrapped in weakness which opens for us the way to God and the meaning of true power.¹³⁶

Christ is not feared, looked up to or envied simply because he is able to link the powerlessness of the manger with that of the cross. Christ as a baby invites none of the fear, distance or envy that power generates. Instead, it is the beginning of a life that is powerless, from a powerless birth in the manger to a powerless death on the cross. Yet, the weakness and powerlessness that Christ generates should not lead to a theology of weakness, which either enslaves one to weakness or becomes a theology for weaklings. Such a theology can only become "a comfortable excuse for incompetence, submissiveness, self-denigration and defeat in all fields".¹³⁷ Instead, paradoxically, a theology of weakness focused on Christ claims power because it creates a total and unconditional dependence on God, which opens the way for divine power to work through us.

Again, like most of the theological positions discussed in this chapter, Nouwen describes God's power as "empowering" and quite different from human perceptions of what power is. Yet, it is still power. In order to be empowered by God, Christians have to move from the human perception of power to the divine, through the experience of

¹³⁴ Ibid., 299.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Henri Nouwen, *The Path of Power* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1995), 19.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

powerlessness. It is a movement from notions of power that promote division, destruction and paralysis to that, which unifies, heals and empowers.¹³⁸

Yet the transformation of power does not come without risk. In *The Wounded Healer* Nouwen explores how Christian ministry involves a sharing in the pain and suffering of others. A theology of weakness centred on Christ empowers but it does so when Christians are prepared to share in the experiences of others. Like Percy, Nouwen recognizes that Christ's healing and empowerment of others involves the sharing and taking on of their afflictions and that this should be the model for Christian ministers and leaders. The wounds of the Christian leader become an avenue for grace in working for the healing of others. The recognition of one's own wounds and need for healing can act as a stream for God's healing power to flow through.¹³⁹ The identification with the suffering and pain of the other is exemplified in the example of Jesus the wounded healer, who is able to heal by taking on the wounds of the other and by his own wounds on the cross which leads to the hope of resurrection, healing and redemption. Key to Nouwen's argument is that no one can take away suffering without first entering and experiencing it.¹⁴⁰

Hope and transformation can occur here when the common pains, brokenness and wounds of others are shared. When a community can shoulder the pains and experiences of its members then this becomes a way to liberation. Christ's power empowers and creates a sense of hope, not because all wounds are healed and all pain alleviated, but rather in the sharing of the wounds and pain comes a sharing and deepening of hope for the future. In this mutual sharing comes the potential for a new vision and transformation of who we are as Christians. For Nouwen the mutual sharing of pain can open the door for a mutual healing and the sharing of Christ's power that transforms and liberates us.¹⁴¹

This transformation of power can only occur, however, when the "goal posts are moved" and the game is redefined; in other words, when human notions and

¹³⁸ Ibid., 40.

¹³⁹ Andrew Sung Park, *From Hurt to Healing: A Theology of the Wounded* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 132.

¹⁴⁰ Henri J M Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (New York: Image Books Doubleday, 1990), 72.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 72-73, 93-94.

expectations of what power is are unmasked as nothing more than illusions.¹⁴² Christ enters the world in powerlessness precisely to challenge and overturn notions of power that seek to dominate, enslave or control and, by doing so, to offer the world an alternative. That alternative is divine power that seeks to empower and liberate and not control, manipulate or destroy.¹⁴³

8. *Implications for Melanesia*

The theological positions explored in this chapter all posit definitions of power that stress the primacy of relationships and attempt to move away from any notion of power as a form of domination. This stems from a European context where power is questioned and often seen negatively as a form of control, yet the implications of the search for a redefinition of power extends beyond the European context.

In the previous chapter, I argued that Melanesian theology was the result of an interaction between received European versions of Christianity and the Melanesian worldviews they encountered. This process is continuous as Melanesian theologies emerge from the resulting synthesis that alters the versions of Christianity Melanesians received and the Melanesian worldviews that engage with them. The boundaries of theological reflection are continually changing not only because of this continual synthesis, but also because the versions of Christianity and Christian theology that came into Melanesia have also altered. Contemporary expatriates doing theology in Melanesia, have strong personal connections back into European theologies and are determined by various European theological traditions and contexts that are changing, and this will determine the type of theology that they develop in Melanesia.

For example, if European theology is redefining the meaning of power, then this will influence the type of theological reflection that European theologians construct, particularly in contexts where Christianity was received from a context of power. The changing roles of expatriates doing theology in Melanesia from instigator to supporter imply a significant change in power relations between the two. The changing context of power in European theology should enable expatriates to approach Melanesian theology

¹⁴² Nouwen, *The Path of Power*, 18.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 33.

and worldviews, not from a position of power, but rather from a desire for mutual relationship, openness and influence to the other.

If expatriates coming from a context seeking to question and redefine power, are engaging with Melanesian theologies and worldviews that revolve around notions of community and the primacy of relationships, then there is potential for inter-cultural dialogue and theologies. The stress on relational power, for example, provides a way to dialogue with Melanesian theologies of power. Both European and Melanesian contexts are dealing with issues of power in one form or another and such dialogue between them provides a theological synthesis that mutually enriches and empowers both contexts.

The concept of relational power developed by Loomer within the process theology tradition, not only takes interrelatedness and interdependence seriously but places them at the centre of reality. They are a basic condition of life. It is from these relationships that the conditions for a mutual sharing of power can exist and this process is creative and dynamic. Process theologians remind us that God is in this relationship and is profoundly affected by it to the extent that God is as open to risk and destruction of relationship as we all are. Feminist theology, on the other hand, also reminds us that relationship needs to be taken seriously simply because God is either in relationship or is relationship. If this is the case then traditional notions of God's power need to be reconsidered, especially those that connect divine perfection with separation from the world and, by implication, separation from relationship. It also leads to theologies that focus on the refusal to accept or recognize basic human interconnectedness and the abuse of power in relationship as forms of sin, as in Carter Heyward.

Liberation theology, on the other hand, reminds us that power can become a destructive idolatry that leads to oppression and the destruction of relationship. If God's power is about the empowerment of the other then the divine is in confrontation with any power that leads to destruction. Christ as the liberator is a life-giving God in confrontation with all forces that promote death. Liberationists remind us that power can be corrupted and manipulated into a destructive force that can spread through the structures and processes of any society. Christ as life-giver is involved in the transformation of power from that which kills into something which gives life. Life is at the heart of the Melanesian

worldview and hence Christ in Melanesia should be all about a God of life who confirms life and who transforms relationships and communities into that life.

If we see God's power at work in relationships then it is a life-giving power that is community forming and empowering. Both Leech and Percy indicate that it is power that operates when given away to the other. Nouwen stresses the risk and reality of relationship in that if we are truly in relationship then we also take in the wounds and afflictions of the other just as much as the joy and laughter. The web of community and relationships become channels for an understanding of God's power that takes in the wounds and by doing so becomes a means for empowerment, transformation and healing.

All of these theologies suggest a desire to move from an individualistic notion of power as control to a communal sense of power based on mutual relationships. Yet concepts of an interconnecting web of relationships, self-deriving meaning from community, power existing in relationship and recognition of the negative effects of broken relationships all exist across Melanesian worldviews and theologies. This would suggest that if European theology is open to the perspective and mutual influence of Melanesian theology, then Melanesian theology may provide a way to enrich European theological context by adding to it something dynamic and unique. Similarly, European theological concepts of relational power can contribute to Melanesian theologies of power by adding something equally dynamic that may hold the key to addressing theological tensions within the Melanesian Brotherhood and beyond. Such an emerging cross-cultural theology of power may then move beyond being a theology which exacerbates existing theological tensions, to one that helps in alleviating them.

Chapter 8

Synthesis

The focus of this thesis has been a specific event in Solomon Islands life and history that has created the conditions for a theological examination of mana in the Melanesian Brotherhood. It has also provided the means to construct a contextual theology which both retrieves existing Melanesian concepts and emerges from the interaction between Melanesian and European theologies of power.

My examination of power in both Melanesian and European theology brings to light the profound interconnectedness of theological reflection and cultural relativity. My own theological reflection evolves out of a personal story and experience of Melanesia which, while culturally relative, has something constructive to say to Melanesians. The experience of the event at the heart of this thesis has an intensity that shapes and informs my theological reflection. It may not be as intense an experience as those directly involved in the event but it remains an experience nevertheless. My contribution comes in the experience and interpretation of this event in a Melanesian context and my own British theological tradition that I bring to it. Such an interpretation of events is a continual interaction between my own British theological traditions and the Melanesian worldviews and theologies with which they are engaging. While this sets the boundaries for theological limitations, it enables a drawing upon theologies developed outside Melanesia in order to dialogue with events within.

Importantly, such theological reflection is not a purely “British” interpretation of events in Melanesia. While some theologians may want to separate “British” and “Melanesian” as mutually exclusive propositions, this thesis deals with the interaction between them. My examination of Melanesian theology has suggested that much of it is the result of the interaction between Melanesians and the various versions of Christianity they have received. It is not purely “Melanesian” as such because what is “Melanesian” has been dynamically altered by the interaction with a Christianity received from various “European” traditions: it is a response to a theological synthesis of cultures. Similarly, my theological reflection in Melanesia is neither purely “British” nor purely “Melanesian” but is shaped and determined by the interaction of both. The result is a

conversation and interaction between non-Melanesian and Melanesian theologies of power, the fruits of which have something to say to both Melanesian theology and theologies developed in my own British theological tradition.

1. *Stages of Theological Dialogue*

Theological dialogue is key here, as any theology in Melanesia will have to interact or dialogue with Melanesian concepts and worldviews as well as the Christian traditions that have been received and have influenced them. My research on the Melanesian Brotherhood, for example, leads me into dialogue with Melanesian concepts of mana and how they operate within the Brotherhood. Since mana is fundamentally interconnected with other Melanesian concepts, this means that such dialogue cannot treat mana as a disconnected piece but rather as an interconnected whole. In order to understand how mana operates one has to understand its place in Melanesian worldviews. Yet, these worldviews are themselves fundamentally altered by their interaction with received versions of Christianity, so the dialogue is not only with Melanesian concepts but also how they operate in a changed Christian context.

This process of dialogue is not new. When the first missionaries came to Melanesia with their numerous versions of the “Gospel”, they were at various levels dialoguing with Melanesian worldviews. The extent, nature and limitations of that dialogue would, of course, have depended on the denomination, worldview and personality of each of those missionaries, but there was some level of dialogue and interaction going on.

Having said that, the nature of the dialogue and interaction that occurred is quite different to what is occurring in contemporary Melanesian theology. Contemporary expatriate theologians are not first generation missionaries any more than contemporary Melanesians are first contact locals. Expatriate theologians doing theology in Melanesia come from a fundamentally different theological context and worldview as their missionary predecessors. They have, for example, had to come to terms with the cultural relativity of their own theological positions and the recognition that a plurality of cultures presupposes a plurality of theologies.¹

¹ David J Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 452.

Similarly, contemporary Melanesian theologians are engaging with the further stage of theological synthesis beyond the initial encounter of Melanesian cultures and various versions of Christianity received and live in contexts fundamentally shaped and reshaped by the effects of that synthesis. Melanesian theology is a response and contribution to the continuous fusion of cultures, contexts and theologies that have resulted from that initial encounter. The implications of how that synthesis alters and informs Melanesian cultures, contexts and worldviews and the version of Christ and his Gospel that was received, creates the conditions for a recognition of Christ in Melanesia and the possibility of understanding him through Melanesian experience.

When, for example, expatriate and Melanesian theologians describe the encounter between missionaries and Melanesians as a “power encounter”, they are describing the interaction of various introduced European theologies of power engaging with those of existing Melanesian worldviews. These are, however, descriptions of first contact encounter. What concerns us in this thesis is the stage beyond this where Melanesian theology, itself the product of a continual synthesis between what Melanesians received, accepted and interpreted, is able to dialogue with European theologies of power that have in themselves changed as European theological contexts have altered. The theological reflection that develops in this thesis begins at the intersection of Melanesian and European theologies of power, the purpose being to make connections between them.

The missionaries who brought various versions of the Gospel to Melanesia were themselves products of various European theological contexts but they often taught or imparted them as cultural universals. The Melanesian acceptance of that “Gospel” however, was not simply the passive acceptance of something coming in from outside but the beginning of an interactive process between the Gospel of the missionaries and the seeds of a Gospel in Melanesia. Melanesians accepted the version of the Gospel they received because they saw within it something which could complement their own worldviews and cultural systems and yet add a new and dynamic perspective, which opened up new possibilities and potentialities.

2. ***Creation-Centred versus Redemption-Centred Theologies***

What does it mean to say that the Gospel both complements and adds something new and dynamic to Melanesian worldviews? Bevans argues that how we do contextual theology is determined by our basic theological orientation and he identifies two that are particularly relevant. The first, a *creation-centred* approach, works from the premise that human experience and context is essentially good. The world is where God's nature is revealed and God's grace can build on that world precisely because it is capable of being built on and perfected in relationship to God. In such an approach, sin exists as the attempt to "get out of life what God has not put into it".² The world is essentially good and sin is the spoiling of that essential goodness, but this does not prevent God's revelation in the world building on that essential goodness contained within.³

The second, a *redemption-centred* approach, implies that human experience and context is essentially corrupt. God cannot build on or perfect it because instead of revealing God's presence the world is distorting and rebelling against it. What is required therefore is a radical transformation or total replacement of human experience and culture. Christ has to be brought to a culture and break into it before it, (the culture), can have any saving meaning whatsoever. In such a view there can be no continuity between the world and divine reality; rather the two remain in fundamental tension with each other.⁴

Even though this distinction grossly oversimplifies the theological issues, it does nevertheless help to illustrate how the type of contextual theology that develops will depend on which of these approaches is adopted. For example, a *creation-centred* approach allows theologians to approach context positively as an area of God's activity and as an important theological source. Taking a *redemption-centred* approach would mean a more negative attitude to context as something which can never reveal God's nature; rather it must always be confronted and challenged by God breaking into it from outside.⁵

² John Oman, *Grace and Personality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1917). Quoted in Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Revised and Expanded Edition*, 21.

³ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Revised and Expanded Edition*, 21.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵ *Ibid.*

These two particular approaches, however, are not without difficulties. A *creation-centred* theology, for example, that recognizes God's presence within human experience and context, has a rich history in the Catholic tradition through the recognition of natural religions, natural theology and of God's grace in non-Christian religions emphasised in the Second Vatican Council. The argument that Melanesians converted to Christianity because they saw something which complemented or corresponded to their own religious and cultural systems implies God's presence within Melanesian worldviews and seems to work out of such a *creation-centred* approach. However, a critical question remains as to what is happening when the "Gospel" of the missionaries interacts with Melanesian worldviews. One option would be to consider such worldviews as a *preparation* for the receiving of the Gospel (implying that they have some role to play in God's process of salvation for Melanesians) or, similarly, to develop some kind of *fulfilment* theology where Christ fulfils the aspirations of cultural traditions by coming into them from outside.

In the light of our examination of theological and cultural relativity in Melanesia, such a position is problematic. The question is, if it is *preparation* for the "Gospel", whose version are we talking about? Such a *preparation* model may allow Melanesian cultures to have some role in Christ's saving presence for Melanesians but it remains preparation for a received Christianity coming in from outside. This "Christianity", the product of a quite different social location and worldview, assumes a privileged position over Melanesian experiences of God by superseding them as merely a preparation or prequel for the main event, the coming of a European "Gospel". Bosch draws our attention to how such a theological position is largely the product of Western theological traditions influenced by evolutionary theory, the rise of liberal theology and a conviction that although other religious traditions could prepare the way, Christianity, and by implication a European version of it, was superior to them all.⁶

Similarly, any *fulfilment* model implies a concept of Christ fulfilling not from within Melanesia but rather by breaking in from outside. This, argues Gibbs, would suggest that Melanesian experience plays no role in the mystery of salvation.⁷ Rather Christ fulfils the aspirations of Melanesians not from within their worldviews or experiences

⁶ Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 479-481.

⁷ Gibbs, "'It's in the Blood': Dialogue with Primal Religion in Papua New Guinea," 130.

but rather as a divine response from outside that cultural tradition. The question then is how can Christ, fashioned and interpreted in various European contexts, fulfil the aspirations of Melanesians with a completely different worldview, one that experiences life and human relationships in a completely different form? Not only does the act of coming in from outside reinforce the view that Christ speaks to Melanesians outside their experiences, but also questions how much trust can be placed in a European version of Christ fulfilling Melanesian aspirations?

Mantovani, aware of this problem, suggests that Christianity has often failed to take account of existing Melanesian spirituality and, instead of seeking to build on it, introduces its own version as a rival competitor. As Melanesians are encouraged to accept the introduced “Christian” version, Christ is presented as the answer to the questions and problems of that introduced spirituality. Melanesian spirituality remains, but instead of Christ addressing it, he becomes the solution to the aspirations of an introduced European spirituality which is foreign and outside Melanesian experience.⁸

Not only is there a proliferation of versions of Christ in Melanesia, but any *fulfilment* model based on a European understanding of who Christ is, would make assumptions about Melanesian aspirations and then project them onto the Melanesian context. Those assumptions may simply be a false interpretation or artificial construct that does not reflect what Melanesians aspire to in their own particular worldviews and experiences.

The *redemption-centred* approach is equally as problematic because Christ does not break into Melanesia from a cultural vacuum. The argument that culture distorts God’s reality and that Christ must challenge and transform it is the product of, and a response to, a particular social and cultural context and the version of Christ implied within it is a product of it. The danger of such an argument in Melanesia is that Melanesian culture is interpreted as corrupt and needs to be supplanted by Christ over and against it. Yet, the received “Christ” is already the product of a particular culture. Any “supplanting” here would be into the thought forms and worldviews of a Christ who, while presented as a theological absolute above and against culture, is the product of a particular culture. Christ in Melanesia cannot be cultureless and any critique of culture as corrupt would

⁸ Mantovani, "Key Issues of a Dialogue between Christianity and Culture in Melanesia."

have to extend to the cultures and contexts of the missionaries who brought Christ in the first place and, by implication, to their interpretation of Christ himself.

Both theological approaches are problematic. Is it a question of accepting one of them as a basic theological orientation or of combining them in some kind of dialectical tension, or is it that we are asking the wrong questions? Nearly thirty years ago, Turner was arguing that missions did not bring God to Melanesia. Rather God has always been present, and the challenge for both “Western” and Melanesian theology is to explicate what did come second, namely Christian missions and how they brought *fulfilment* and *transformation* to the Melanesian religious experience.⁹

Perhaps, by way of a response to Turner, we can question whether missions actually did bring *fulfilment* and *transformation* to the Melanesian religious experience as he assumes. While we can argue that missionaries were the catalysts for vast social and cultural changes across Melanesia as Melanesians converted to Christianity, it may be more helpful to describe this as the beginning of a process whereby Melanesians dialogue with the Christianity they accepted, leading to the reception of Christ’s presence within their own experience and worldview. Missionaries are important in this process because as bearers of the “Gospel” they create the conditions for Melanesians to receive and recognize Christ’s presence. Any *fulfilment* or *transformation* that occurs from this interactive process, however, arises not as the direct result of missionaries but rather from Melanesians dialoguing with the received Gospel message, Melanesian experience and God’s presence in Melanesia.

In this way, we are able to recognize the presence of God in Melanesia, the coming of the Gospel and the contribution of Christian missionaries, alongside the uniqueness of the Melanesian response. This allows for the growth of a Melanesian Gospel out of the interaction between what is received and how it is interpreted and redefined through Melanesian experience.

⁹ Harold W Turner, "Old and New Religions in Melanesia," *Point*, no. 2 (1978): 19.

3. *Pieris' Helicopter Theory*

A way of understanding the implications of this interaction between the received Gospel and the Melanesian worldviews and experience it meets, is suggested by Pieris and his "helicopter theory of religious expansion". While writing predominantly about the religious situation in Asia, such a theory, argues Gibbs, is also helpful for the Melanesian context.¹⁰ Pieris describes traditional or primal religions as "cosmic" being concerned with sacred and earthly matters and their relationship to the mysteries of life. Religions such as Christianity he terms "metacosmic" as they are concerned more with transcendent otherworldly realities. When a metacosmic religion meets a cosmic understanding, it functions like a metacosmic helicopter landing on a cosmic landing pad. Primal religions are not exchanged or given up for the religion of the missionaries, rather they interact and complement each other.¹¹ Gibbs argues that the implication of such a view is that people do not necessarily have to give away their traditional religion in becoming Christian. They cannot, because cosmic spirituality is part of what makes a person religious, or indeed human, regardless of context or identity.¹² This is important for theological dialogue in Melanesia because, according to Gibbs, some forms of Christianity can arrive on the landing pad like helicopter gun-ships driving theological values and spirituality underground. Theological dialogue does not operate in this way; rather it begins with a sympathetic understanding of the salvific significance of key cultural values that are often values associated with life and well-being.¹³

4. *A Melanesian Gospel*

Both Pieris and Gibbs imply that the interaction between a received Christianity and existing Melanesian worldviews does not preclude a Christian presence within those worldviews. In this way it is helpful to see the coming of Christianity to Melanesia not as the rejection of the old in favour of the new, neither as the acceptance of the new in the light of existing cultural systems, but as the acceptance and re-imagining of the old

¹⁰ See Aloysius Pieris, *Fire and Water* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996); Gibbs, "'It's in the Blood': Dialogue with Primal Religion in Papua New Guinea," 130-131.

¹¹ See also Turner, "Old and New Religions in Melanesia," 14.

¹² Gibbs, "'It's in the Blood': Dialogue with Primal Religion in Papua New Guinea," 131. A similar point is made in Ejenobo's assessment of contextualisation in Africa. See David T Ejenobo, "Contextualisation of Christianity in Africa," *Pacific Journal of Theology* 2, no. 35 (2006).

¹³ Gibbs, "'It's in the Blood': Dialogue with Primal Religion in Papua New Guinea," 138.

in the light of the received Gospel, a Gospel which does not reject what it interacts with but rather creates a process that empowers Melanesians to retrieve, recognize and develop elements of a Melanesian Gospel within Melanesian experience. Oduyoye describes a similar process occurring in African interaction with the Gospel wherein African cultures were re-imagined from the perspective of the new and revitalising agents of the Gospel.¹⁴

The initial encounter between missionaries and Melanesian cultures may have had considerable limitations, but it was the beginning of dialogue from which Melanesian theology, the validity of Melanesian experience as a theological source, and the foundation for a Melanesian Gospel emerges. This dialogue is crucially a continuous process as the conversation between Melanesian and missionary subsequently develops and expands to include all involved in theological reflection in Melanesia and beyond. The contemporary dialogue between Melanesian and expatriate in the doing of Melanesian theology continually creates and recreates the conditions for the possibilities of Christ in Melanesian experience to be explored and articulated.

Crucially here, the introduction of Christianity to Melanesia is more than simply the introduction of Christ to Melanesia. Rather it is the means to create possibilities for the recognition of Christ as present within Melanesian experience and which enables Melanesians to experience their salvation through the terms of their own worldviews. This enables Melanesian writers such as Boe to say, "Missionaries did not actually bring Christ with them to Melanesia; they went to Melanesia to tell (our ancestors) where Christ is to be found". Or Boseto to comment that, "We can learn much from our traditional cultures concerning the God-given Good News which our ancestors treasured for hundreds of years before the written words about Jesus were introduced to our shores by those belonging to foreign cultures". Or Iawak that, "The doctrine of God being omnipresent...implies that God was in Vanuatu even before the arrival of the missionaries. The missionaries did not carry God in their vessels, but they carried the

¹⁴ See also Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "African Culture and the Gospel: Inculturation from an African Woman's Perspective," in *One Gospel--Many Cultures: Case Studies and Reflections on Cross-Cultural Theology*, ed. Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Hendrik M Vroom, *Currents of Encounter: Studies on the Contact between Christianity and Other Religions, Beliefs, and Cultures* (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 2003), 52; Ahrens, "The Promise of New Life: Some Remarks on the Dynamics of Christianity in Oceania," 188-194.

knowledge of the true living God".¹⁵ These comments suggest a recognition of God's presence in Melanesia and the coming of the "Gospel" enables Melanesians to recognize that presence and that of Christ who enters and yet is present in Melanesian experience relating to it as a Melanesian Christ through a Melanesian Gospel.

For Gibbs, the possibility of Melanesian cultural values being a foundation for a Melanesian Gospel is one laden with potential. For example he identifies Melanesian spirituality with its sense of the sacred, and integration into the events of daily life, the sense of rituals including human involvement, the strong sense of justice based on reciprocity and communal values with their sense of sharing and communal ownership, as possible cultural foundations for the Gospel.¹⁶

While Gibbs is clearly eager for such theological interaction to take place, he is aware of the difficulties that may result from it. There is a very real danger that traditional culture can be romanticised and everything within it accepted uncritically as good and desirable.¹⁷ It may also become nostalgia, a remembering of a past which may not have actually existed in the first place, an artificial construct of a cultural ideal.¹⁸ Cultures do not remain static and so any romantic ideal of Melanesian culture, if it ever existed in the first place, will alter in its interaction with other Melanesian cultures and those of the missionaries, traders and colonial powers. That process of change and interaction is continuous, meaning that dialogue which creates the conditions for a Melanesian Gospel, involves a process of creation and recreation as the Gospel continually interacts with cultures that are dynamic and evolving. The development of a Melanesian Gospel, then, requires a continuous and dynamic process of dialogue made possible by the equally continuous process of doing Melanesian theology. This process of doing theology feeds the development of a Melanesian Gospel.

Yet if a Melanesian Gospel is developing, the key is that this is happening within Melanesia and not from outside. Paroi talks of doing theology from within, by which he

¹⁵ See Boe, "The Missionaries and Their Gospel- the Melanesians and Their Response," 113; Leslie Boseto, "The Gospel of Economy from a Solomon Islands Perspective," *Pacific Journal of Theology* 2, no. 8 (1992): 79; Christopher Iawak, "Jesus the Great Healer," in *Gospel and Culture in Vanuatu 4: Local Voices on Jesus Christ and Mission*, ed. Randall Prior (Wattle Park, Australia: Gospel Vanuatu Books, 2005), 32.

¹⁶ Gibbs, "Missionaries and Culture," 9.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁸ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Revised and Expanded Edition*, 60.

means theology whose basis is in the thought patterns of Melanesians themselves.¹⁹ A Melanesian Gospel grows out of the Melanesian experience of accepting a received Gospel but also the realization that this is but one version of the Gospel and that Christ's presence in Melanesia allows a Melanesian version to flourish. If Christ in Melanesia is about the acceptance and re-imagining of the old in the light of what the Gospel adds to it, then this implies an adding of something new to the experience of the old. It does this by accepting and embracing key Melanesian concepts such as fullness of life, community, relationships, mana and so on. Yet while the Gospel embraces these concepts it is also fundamentally touching and transforming them, to the extent that, rather than a dilution of the Gospel to fit existing cultural systems, it brings a new and transforming element to those systems.

Christ, therefore, does not reject Melanesian cultures or worldviews but recreates them by his presence within them. The Gospel is crucial to an internal transformation and fulfilment of Melanesian cultures and, as that Gospel continues to develop and its implications are worked out in Melanesian theology, then fulfilment and transformation is a continuous process, the conditions for both being continually created and recreated by the dialogue between the Gospel and the Melanesian culture from which it is emerging.

Melanesian theology is crucial in this process because it is where the implications of what Christ does in Melanesia are articulated and the possibilities of a transforming and fulfilling Gospel are realized. This, too, is a continuous process and can only happen when Melanesian theologians are prepared to engage in theological dialogue with each other and the various expatriate theologians and theological traditions represented within and outside Melanesia. This is a continuous and circular process. The Gospel transforms cultural concepts by revealing Christ's presence within them and informs theological reflection, which articulates the implications of that transforming presence. Contextual theologies have an essential role in this process because, although culturally relative, they represent a diversity of attempts to articulate how God is present in a particular culture or cultures. While the conversation between them informs theology at a local level, the possibilities of dialogue existing with theologies developed outside

¹⁹ Henry Paroi, "Decolonizing Theology," 28-29.

Melanesia reveal potential for new perspectives on how the transforming presence of the Gospel can be both realized and expressed from within. A similar process and potential also exists for the Gospel presence in the dialogue partner, who is informed and gains new insights into how the Gospel transforms from within their own respective cultures.

This conversation creates potential at various levels of theological reflection. The first is between Melanesian theologians who represent a diversity of Melanesian cultures and contexts and, when in conversation with each other, are able to appreciate Christ's presence in their own cultural, theological and denominational traditions while being aware of his presence in others. This awareness allows for an appreciation of the richness of Christian presence across Melanesia, and the experience of Christ in one context illuminating or enriching theological reflection in another.

The second level of theological reflection comes in the conversation between Melanesian and expatriate theologians doing theology in Melanesia. The development of a Melanesian Gospel emerging out of Melanesian experience implies that the prime agents in that development must be Melanesian because they are making sense of Christ's presence within their own thought forms and worldviews. Yet a dialogue with expatriates who represent various theological positions and who have more access to and familiarity with "European" forms of theology, may allow Melanesians to recognize the contextual limitations and strengths of the Christianity they have inherited and of their own theological positions. The European theological denominational positions and worldviews of those expatriates are, of course, quite different from the missionaries that came before them but that in itself implies that they have a contribution in sharing the insights and experiences of European theological reflection as it has come to terms with its own cultural and theological relativity.

The third level of theological reflection comes in the dialogue between Melanesian theology and theological traditions developed outside Melanesia. While this dialogue takes place with the various Christian traditions represented by expatriates within Melanesia, it is largely an internal discussion for issues in Melanesian theology. The encounter with positions developed outside is useful because theology everywhere is

trying to articulate the presence of Christ in various contexts and the insights of one theology will help in the construction of contextual theology in another.

However, the emergence of a Melanesian Gospel implies an experience of God that is uniquely Melanesian and one that will enrich theological reflection generally by adding something new, dynamic and “Melanesian” to it. Melanesian theology can, therefore, offer alternative models of God and human/divine interaction in the world and May suggests that this process began when the biocosmic religions of Melanesia accepted the metacosmic perspectives of Christianity, which were “complementary to its own innate orientation to a transcendence of a different sort, manifested not in concepts and ideals but in communal and cosmic relationships”.²⁰ Transcendence in Melanesian religion, argues May, should be sought not in abstract concepts or moral ideals but in the immediacy of intra- and inter-group relationships.²¹ For Ahrens, the acceptance of Christianity involved the acceptance of a story which seemed capable of accommodating new, as yet unknown experiences and providing a new hope for the future. The attraction of the story was, he adds, that it suggests a future “pregnant with life” and the challenge for Melanesians is now that the coming of Christianity has inexorably changed their past, who do they want to be for tomorrow?²² That future is one laden with both risk and exciting potential:

...the truth of the story is being tested. Its validity to reassert itself in the face of new and yet unknown experiences is of course being challenged time and again. It may be that christianity [sic] will be shed as poorly glued veneer comes off its underground. But it may also be possible that something new is growing, real wood.²³

If Christ in Melanesian experience provides alternative models of God that add something new and dynamic to theological reflection, then those models, as they come into dialogue with Western or European theological traditions can offer insights that not only challenge those traditions and their interpretations of God but may also provide them with a way to come to terms with a key issue which preoccupies them, namely the theological treatment of power. The conversation that exists between Melanesian and

²⁰ May, *Transcendence and Violence: The Encounter of Buddhist, Christian and Primal Traditions*, 58.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

²² Ahrens, "The Promise of New Life: Some Remarks on the Dynamics of Christianity in Oceania," 192.

²³ *Ibid.*

non-Melanesian theologies of power at the heart of my theological reflection is intended to develop a response to the murder of the seven Brothers and the use and misuse of mana in the Melanesian Brotherhood. While this conversation has created the conditions for a contextual theology in Melanesia, it also provides the basis for Melanesian theology to both contribute to and challenge those theological traditions that it has encountered.

5. *Relational Power: A Starting Point*

Throughout this thesis I have argued that Melanesian religions, cultures and societies are inherently relational. One finds both identity and security in belonging to a community and forming part of the web of relationships within. Access to and acquisition of mana was only possible if relationships to others were maintained. Essentially, one had to be in relationships of one form or another simply to survive. While the aim was to acquire power for both survival and success in daily life, power could only be acquired through participation in a relational process. One has to be involved in a relational process with people, ancestors and the land in order to acquire power but the reasons for acquiring it were for the personal benefit of one's family group or clan as and against those outside.

The concept of relational power as developed in the non-Melanesian theologies of power, identified in the last chapter, resonates here because a form of relational power already exists and operates in the Melanesian context. Yet, crucially, it is relational power, but existing for the acquisition of personal benefit. Relationships exist here as a means to an end, in order to acquire power.

Missionary anthropologists such as Tippett and Whiteman have argued that a significant factor in the conversion of Melanesians to Christianity was the question of power. If relationships were established and maintained with the source of that power, namely the Christian God, then power was available and could be acquired and activated in pursuit of the Melanesian ideal of fullness of life. Power under the new religion could be acquired through a relational process but it could still be manipulated in the pursuit of individual well-being or benefit.

It seems to me, however, that the key to developing contextual theology in Melanesia is the realization that it is more than simply a question of power. Rather, power is the means to life. If Mantovani is correct in identifying fullness of life as the key Melanesian concept then Melanesians converted to Christianity not solely on the basis of power. Rather they saw within it a concept of life that resonated with their own cultural understanding while also providing the possibility for a new and dynamic experience of life itself.

The question for Melanesian theology then is how to articulate what Christ brings to “life” in a Melanesian context. A way forward here is found, not in the rejection of power, but rather in its affirmation and an acceptance of its interconnectedness with life itself.

How we define both “power” and “life” is of paramount importance. The key here is how Christ’s “power” operates in the Gospels, which is the reference point for many theologies of power. Likewise, I maintain that any theological discussion of power in a Melanesian context needs to be modelled on Christ’s words and actions in the Gospel. By doing so we can recognize similarities between the concepts of power operating in Melanesian worldviews and the power claimed and directed by Christ. Both are relational in nature, community forming and, crucially, both are concerned with life in all its fullness.

Mantovani maintains that fullness of life, at the heart of Melanesian worldviews, was readily available in the present world to be claimed and channelled through the various relational webs and processes that make up life itself. However we must be cautious and ask what is the “life” that we are talking about? Melanesian author Narokobi describes religious experience for a Melanesian as “a total encounter of the living person with the universe that is alive and explosive....An experience for a Melanesian, I believe, is the person’s total encounter with the spirit, the law, the economics, the politics and life’s total whole”.²⁴ I would agree with other Melanesian authors such as Ole that this is a definition of what life means in Melanesian worldviews and Paroi’s development of a

²⁴ Bernard Narokobi, "What Is Religious Experience for a Melanesian?," 8.

Melanesian theology based on the relationship to land, illustrates this further.²⁵ He explains it thus:

Proper behaviour to keep the spirits happy produces the good life that finds its expression in abundant harvest, many children and a thriving population. Good life not only means plenty of food or many people; it also embraces the whole of life including the sociological, cultural, political, economical and psychological aspects of human life. Sociologically speaking plenty of food makes possible more giving and receiving. Culturally, the good life means resources to fulfil traditional obligations. In political terms, more food means more allies and stronger relations. Economically, more food means wider exchanges can be carried out. Psychologically, more food means security. Religiously, more food means spirit beings are content and happy with their living relatives. It is a guarantee for the living relatives that their relationship with spirit beings is sound and good.²⁶

Here we have various definitions of what life means for Melanesians but the danger of romanticising it as a kind of cultural ideal remains not only, as May warns, for expatriates who idealise and categorise it through their own European interpretations, but also for Melanesians who can equally romanticise cultural ideals as some kind of pre-Christian utopia. May argues that life here means nothing less than “physical survival, the primordial continuity of human participation in the processes of nature”.²⁷ There can be no retrieval of cultural utopias that may simply be romanticised inventions, but I agree with sympathetic expatriates such as Gibbs that, although traditional values and beliefs have been altered in their interaction with Christianity and in some cases devalued, suppressed or denied, a cosmic spirituality still remains “in the blood” so to speak.²⁸ There remain basic concepts that shape what life means and is for Melanesians. Following Gibbs and Mantovani, I suggest that the search for life in all its fullness is a search for wholeness, to encounter and be in tune with the forces that make up the totality of life. It is a search for completeness which can only become real in the establishment and maintenance of relational processes.

²⁵ Ronnie Tom Ole, "Making Sense of the Oneness of Life: A Melanesian Christian View on Creation," *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 8, no. 2 (1990): 35.

²⁶ Paroi, "Decolonizing Theology," 33.

²⁷ May, *Transcendence and Violence: The Encounter of Buddhist, Christian and Primal Traditions*, 58.

²⁸ Gibbs, "'It's in the Blood': Dialogue with Primal Religion in Papua New Guinea," 137.

For Mantovani, an understanding of Christ in such a worldview would interpret the death and resurrection as being life-giving to the universe and would enable Melanesians to view Christ as the bringer of fullness of life.²⁹ Such an interpretation suggests that Christ brings “life” as an experience that embraces the totality of Melanesian life and which touches all aspects of what “life” means to Melanesians, including social, cultural, economic, political, natural, religious aspects and so on. Christ’s words, actions and miracles, then, are all demonstrations of that life-giving power, but crucially it is not claimed or directed for Christ’s own personal use or benefit, but rather for the benefit of others, including those outside their own community or family group. Equally as important is that the kind of life-giving power that Christ gives to the other is of little benefit to himself. Rather it is detrimental and ends with the experience of the cross.

Here we have a concrete example of how Christ in Melanesia, if understood through the thought forms and worldviews of Melanesians, does not lead to the rejection of established cultural systems. The relational nature of power in Melanesia and the search for life in all its fullness are concepts embraced and accepted by Christ and in that process, they are both re-imagined and transformed. The nature of that power and fullness of life are recreated and reshaped by a new understanding that the Gospel adds to it, so that power and life as key Melanesian concepts are accepted, yet reworked in Christ from being life-claiming to life-giving.

5.1 Christ, The Life-Giver

If fullness of life is a central value of Melanesian experience then Christ’s presence in Melanesia should be a life-giving one that corresponds to what life means for Melanesians. Following Mantovani, I suggest that Melanesians may have responded to the Gospel because, among other things, it offered a means to life that was already an ultimate concern in Melanesian worldviews. When Jesus proclaims to his disciples that

²⁹ See Ennio Mantovani, "God's Word and the Ancestors Response" (paper presented at the The National Conference Of The Anglican Church Of Papua New Guinea, Popondetta, September-October 1982); Ennio Mantovani, "Christ Our Life" (paper presented at the The National Conference Of The Anglican Church Of Papua New Guinea, Popondetta, September-October 1982); Ennio Mantovani, "Dialoguing with the Biocosmic Aspects of Melanesian Religions: A Missiological Perspective," *International Review of Mission* 91, no. 361 (2002); Mantovani, "Key Issues of a Dialogue between Christianity and Culture in Melanesia."

he is the way, the truth and the life, he is also affirming to Melanesians that his way is both the true reality of God and both life-giving and affirming.³⁰ If Melanesian theology can explore the implications of this in the continuation, protection, maintenance and celebration of life at the heart of Melanesian worldviews, then there is potential for an understanding of Christ as “life” that is uniquely Melanesian.

Christ’s presence in Melanesia is continually life-giving to others yet culminates in the cross, the ultimate example of self-sacrifice to give life to others. Importantly however, expatriate theologians such as Mantovani and Whiteman identify concepts of life-giving sacrifice existing in various parts of Melanesia before the coming of Christianity, in Dema stories. Dema, a word from the Marind-Anim people of Irian Jaya, is a collective term to describe various ancestor myth stories with similar themes across Melanesia. Often the stories tell of how:

...people live in a situation of extreme need; what makes life worth living is missing. Usually, but not always, what is missing is symbolized by the staple food people eat. A member of the community—older brother, sister, mother—who is more than human, asks to be killed by a member of the community and buried. Out of the grave comes what was missing, what makes life worth living.³¹

There are variations to this story but in most cases it is an ancestor killed violently, or who asks to die, and either from his body or from the grave springs a coconut tree, taro, yam, pigs or something which represents life to the community and which is essential for its continuing livelihood.³²

Such stories are significant because they express the concept of one death being life-giving to all and may relate to the life-giving death of Christ on the cross. This would seem to imply that the coming of Christianity to Melanesia did not introduce fundamentally alien concepts to Melanesians. The life-giving death of Christ already had a point of contact in Melanesia, which it could complement. Both Whiteman and

³⁰ John 14: 6

³¹ Mantovani, "Dialoguing with the Biocosmic Aspects of Melanesian Religions: A Missiological Perspective."; Whiteman, "Melanesian Religions: An Overview," 106. See also Rufus Pech, *Manub and Kilibob*, Point Series No.16 (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1991).

³² Whiteman, "Melanesian Religions: An Overview," 106.

Mantovani laments the fact that missionaries, not knowing about the existence of the Dema story, began their proclamation with creation and establishing the Christian God as the creator of the universe. If they had begun with redemption or the events of Good Friday or Easter morning then Melanesians may have recognized more easily concepts with which they were already familiar with in their own cultural myths and stories.³³

Mantovani argues that both Melanesian religions and Christianity share a similar conviction based around life in that both see either something amiss in creation, or something essential missing from it. In both traditions, a figure dies in order to bring new life to a people and community. The difference, argues Mantovani, is that in Christianity the negative aspect of this lack of life is attributed to human sinfulness, while Melanesian religions were concerned not with what has caused the lack of true life but rather how to obtain true life. The Dema offers to die to bring what is missing in creation, life in all its fullness. Christianity, claims Mantovani, stresses human sinfulness as the cause of the lack of life, which means that humanity must repent before receiving "life". In Melanesian religions where the Dema is present, it is a question of bringing new life, not to redress the consequences of sin but rather as an act of pure generosity for the community. Sin in such a context does exist but it is not projected into the past as the cause for lack of life. Instead, it exists in the breaking of relationships and in the refusal to participate in the fullness of life which the Dema provides.³⁴

Perhaps the Dema story stands as an example of how, through the development of Melanesian theology, the implications of a Melanesian Gospel and of Christ's presence within Melanesian cultures and experiences can be worked out. The potential for the presence of Christ in the story and the interaction of the Gospel that touches and transforms it may allow not only its retrieval as a serious Christian expression but challenge Melanesians to work out theologically what the implications of Christ in Melanesia really mean for them in their own cultural concepts. Mantovani's work is largely confined to Papua New Guinea but, if fullness of life is a key concept across Melanesia, the challenge for theologians in Solomon Islands, for example, is to retrieve

³³ Mantovani, "Key Issues of a Dialogue between Christianity and Culture in Melanesia."; Whiteman, "Melanesian Religions: An Overview," 106-107.

³⁴ Mantovani, *Divine Revelation and the Religions of PNG: A Missiological Manual*, 56-57, 76-77.

and recognize similar life-giving concepts in their own traditions and to work out how the Melanesian Gospel is touching and transforming them as expressions of Christ in Melanesia.

Yet both May and Ahrens raise questions over what Christ's identification with the Dema stories might actually mean. Ahrens describes the basic issue of contextualisation of Christianity in Melanesia as a question of whether, in his death, Christ is reinforcing an ideology of retribution and, by implication, violence, in a metaphysical sense, or is he interrupting such an ideology?³⁵ Mantovani maintains that the Dema myth is an example of how new life comes into the biocosmic world as a violent death necessary to bring life, but for Ahrens the identification of Christ with the Dema is to define Christ's death through Melanesian concepts of sacrifice. It can be interpreted as a necessary death in order to bring life, a perfect sacrifice which nullifies the need for any more such sacrifice to make peace with God. While Ahrens admits that this sacrificial concept can speak powerfully in biocosmic contexts such as Melanesia, he questions whether it is not simply "re-paganizing" Christianity by confirming what Melanesian religion has known all along that, "In order to live, life must be killed".³⁶ Christ simply becomes a Melanesian sacrifice that reinforces the ideology of retribution and the need for sacrificial violence. Ahrens comments further:

Perhaps Christianity can provide a table around which once again "grace is said" and the pure gift of life thereby acknowledged. Such a table could become a focus for a renewed praxis of mutuality. In any case, a new balance needs to be cultivated, and a space created where scapegoating is renounced. It is a difficult freedom to learn.³⁷

The key to such an acknowledgement of life and mutuality may be found in the Melanesian Brotherhood and the implications of Christ's mana working through them which we will move on to address later in this chapter.

³⁵ Theodor Ahrens, "On Grace and Reciprocity: A Fresh Approach to Contextualisation with Reference to Christianity in Melanesia," in *Grace and Reciprocity: Missiological Studies*, ed. Theodor Ahrens, *Point Series No. 26* (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute For Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 2002; reprint, 2002), 364-366. See also May, *Transcendence and Violence: The Encounter of Buddhist, Christian and Primal Traditions*, 59.

³⁶ Ahrens, "On Grace and Reciprocity: A Fresh Approach to Contextualisation with Reference to Christianity in Melanesia," 367.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

The eternal presence of God in Melanesia is a continual life-giving presence and a Melanesian Gospel comes into existence through the continuous interaction of European and Melanesian theologies which are mutually enriched and informed by Christ's presence within them. This shapes my theological reflection on what Christ as life-giver means in Melanesia, because it exists not as "Melanesian theology" but rather as theological reflection at the intersection of Melanesian and European theologies of power. The continuous interaction between them can make connections that envisage Christ giving life in a Melanesian context that retains crucial Melanesian elements expressed, for example, in the Dema story while being informed and transformed by the Gospel and the European theological traditions that came with it.

This, I suggest, enables an envisaging of Christ's life-giving power in Melanesia in a way that creates and maintains relationships, but these are more than just a means to an end: in effect, they are the end. Christ's divine power exists and is revealed as life-giving to others and flows through the relationships that it creates and empowers. It is a power that exists primarily for others and it empowers and creates community with and for the sake of others.

Fullness of life, here, is the realization of and acceptance of relationship by living a life for others. It is to participate in the new community that Christ establishes through his own life lived for others. The life that Christ gives us is not life-claiming, but rather life-giving. It is to empower and give others the opportunity to enjoy and partake of the "life" that God gives to us.

It is, I suggest, when we begin to live life sharing in this new community which Christ has created that all our expectations of life, relationships and power are turned upside down. Life in Christ is about participating with others in the body of Christ, the community of all believers. Participating in this community is all about establishing relationships but that relational process is equally transformed. Relationships are formed not for personal well-being, or reciprocal exchange for an eventual return, or kinship obligations, but rather for the sake of the other, to empower the other and to love the other. Christ's command to love God and love neighbour can only become reality through relationships established with God and other people. When love for the other becomes the foundation for that relationship it is the means for God's life and love-

giving power to flow through his people and relationships become the visible signs of that love in action.

Christ, from within the new community, brings wholeness, restoration and healing in a community where the old ways have been transformed and that comes only in the self-giving and the relinquishing of self-interested power that Christ demonstrates.

5.2 Christ, The Mana-Giver

By giving life to Melanesians, Christ is also giving mana, simply because the two are fundamentally interconnected. Yet I suggest that the transformation of mana is not about rejecting the existing cultural definitions and practices of the term, rather it is an expanding and heightening of them. For example, what in Gela of the central Solomon Islands is referred to as *mana*, and in Lau and Are'are cultures of Malaita, and Longuu of Guadalcanal is referred to as *mamana* or *namana* can all mean to empower or to give power. In the To'abaita and Beagu cultures of Malaita, it can mean to be holy or true.³⁸

These are concepts that are not alien to the life-giving power that Christ demonstrates and gives to his followers. On the contrary, if Christ is present in Melanesia and life-giving to Melanesians, it follows that he is present in concepts fundamentally connected to life itself. Christ's mana is about empowerment, holiness and truth but it is a power which is inherently relational and focused on providing life-giving power to the other. It is not about claiming mana for the acquisition of power, status, or for individual or family benefit: rather it is transformed and redefined for the benefit of the other and, more so, it can only exist in relation to the other. Here Christ's use of power in the Gospels becomes most important. He rejects the temptation to accept and claim his power as a personal possession. Instead he transforms and offers it to the community and by doing so, through his ministry, death and resurrection, Christ creates community and empowers it.³⁹

I maintain here that God is a source of mana that empowers his people but, paradoxically, such mana can only exist when used and given for the benefit of the

³⁸ See Keesing, "Rethinking Mana," 140-143.

³⁹ Leech, *We Preach Christ Crucified: The Proclamation of the Cross in a Dark Age*, 16.

other. Christ's mana is still about empowerment, power, blessing and success but only so far as it exists for the benefit of others and that, in itself, expands the possibilities for what "life in all its fullness" means in a Melanesian context.

5.3 Christ's Relational Power in Melanesia: Realities and Consequences

My examination of life and mana in a Melanesian context arises from the conversation between Melanesian and European theologies of power. An important contribution from the latter tradition that may help to illuminate issues further in Melanesia is that of Loomer who claims that alongside the empowering of others must come the shadow of the cross. He argues that the effort required to sustain relationships is high and costly, in that if relationships are about openness to others in order to enrich and empower, then that process of opening up must involve some degree of vulnerability. It does not necessarily follow that "the other" will be receptive, or even willing, to respond positively to that opening up. The cross becomes the ultimate example of the consequences of relational power. Christ's giving up of power and the orientation of his ministry towards others, meant an opening up of himself to the world and the result was a brutal crucifixion.⁴⁰

When Christ transformed the concept of love for God and neighbour in the Gospels he came into conflict with the old religious systems of his own context and the people living under them. Likewise, I suggest that when Christ transforms mana in Melanesia the concept appears to turn on its head as it now becomes a question of giving up power for the sake of the other and Christ's mana can only empower when it is given and not claimed. The difficulty here is that mana operating in this way is no longer about the claiming of power for fullness of life, because that concept transforms in Christ to mean not just life in relationship, but life for relationship. Power in this sense exists for life realized in relationship with others, but this does not preclude the possibility and the temptation to hold on to or claim it for personal power and acquisition. There is always the possibility of Christians who have access to mana, manipulating it to claim life for themselves rather than for giving life to others.

⁴⁰ See Loomer, "Two Kinds of Power," 198.

Living life in all its fullness will bring Christians into contact and indeed conflict with those, including other Christians, who are tempted to claim that power for themselves and who use it in such a way. Here life-giving and life-claiming power exist in tension with each other. The work of American theologian Carter Heyward is useful here in that she maintains that divine power and identity are bound up with relationship: God's very nature is revealed in Christ's desire to be life-giving in relationship and in the consequences of it. The openness and vulnerability that Christ demonstrates is a reflection of who the divine really is.⁴¹

If this is the case, Carter Heyward is helpful in pointing us toward the possibility of divine power being bound up in life-giving relationship and the risk and vulnerability associated with both. Christ is the ultimate example of how when divine, life-giving and relational power is rejected on the cross, it can lead to broken relationships and ultimately death.

Yet the apparent failure of Christ rejected on the cross opens up the possibility for resurrection, which could not have existed without the cross. The British theologian, Percy, argues that when engaging in that process of empowering and life-giving, Christ also takes into himself the afflictions of the other and all that seeks to be life-destroying.⁴² The destruction of relationship on the cross leads to the opportunity for life-destroying power to be shouldered and transformed by Christ into the new life of the resurrection.

An example of the consequences of relational power in Melanesia can be seen in the Dema stories which give us one insight into how life-giving power comes out of a death for the sake of the community. The coming of the Gospel allows for the elaboration of such stories into how Christ's relational power is demonstrated by his death on the cross for the coming of new life in the resurrection. Yet Melanesians often tended to convert to Christianity based not on theological argument but rather on demonstrations of power. Perhaps the death of Bishop Patteson, the first Anglican Bishop of Melanesia, is one example that illuminates this further.⁴³

⁴¹ See Carter Heyward, *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God*.

⁴² Percy, *Power and the Church: Ecclesiology in an Age of Transition*, 31-32.

⁴³ Refer to Chapter 2 for example.

Patteson, one of the first missionaries to Melanesia, “brought” the Gospel to Melanesians, and by doing so was creating the conditions for a Melanesian Gospel. While his missionary methods were innovative, it was his death as a concrete physical event that attracted the most attention. Despite some historical discrepancies, it was interpreted, particularly by members of the Melanesian Mission, as a martyr’s death and as the direct result of the “black-birding” slave labour trade. The events of the death took on an almost mystical quality and had a galvanising effect on the Mission in the recruitment of new missionaries and the subsequent development of the autonomous Church of Melanesia. Patteson’s “martyr’s” death passed into Church legend.

Yet it was the facts of his death and the subsequent interpretations of it that probably had more impact on Anglican Melanesians and a Melanesian Gospel than anything else. Is it possible that such concrete events have enabled Melanesians to develop a Melanesian interpretation of the Gospel that looks back at such events in a new light? Is it possible for Melanesians, when retrieving their own stories of life-giving sacrifice such as the Dema stories or subsequent equivalents, to recreate and reinterpret the story of Patteson in a uniquely Melanesian way, one that may become a concrete example of a death that brings new life? I suggest that the Melanesian response and interpretation of events such as Patteson’s death is a continuous process illuminated by the growth of a Melanesian Gospel.

When the presence of Christ is realized in Melanesian concepts and the Gospel grows within them, then Gospel events, the coming of Christianity to Melanesia and significant events in Melanesian history can be interpreted anew through Melanesian experience. This interpretation is a continuous process as Melanesian theology develops, leading to new forms of a Melanesian Gospel being realized through the thought forms of Melanesians themselves. Crucially it is the Melanesian Gospel that adds a new and transforming element to that interpretation, so that events are not just interpreted in Melanesian cultural forms but also through the transforming presence of the Gospel.

In this way, how much is Patteson’s death a Christian witness of how Christ speaks and demonstrates his mana to Melanesians? The historian, Hilliard, has written about how many of the first converts to Christianity took it for granted that the new religion had

died along with Patteson. How, then, in the light of the development of an autonomous Church in Melanesia, is this an example of death bringing new life, new opportunity and new relationships?⁴⁴ How far is the Church of Melanesia witness to Christ's mana working through the death of Patteson to create new life and opportunities for Melanesians? These are questions for Melanesians as they retrieve and reflect on concepts from their own cultural traditions that, in the light of a Gospel which transforms, may be provided a way to see Patteson's death anew in Melanesian terms as a concrete example and witness of God's relational and life-giving power.

The death of the seven Brothers is another specific event in Melanesian Christian history and similar questions apply here. How much are these deaths an example of Christian witness to the consequences of relational power in Melanesia? Certainly they are interpreted with recourse back to the death of Patteson and other martyrs of Melanesia, but does the presence of Christ in Melanesia, living through Melanesian concepts and experience, enable, require and even compel Melanesians to interpret such events anew in Melanesian terms and thought forms? For example, does the Dema story, or any equivalent for Solomon Islanders, have any relevance for this event? What does the story tell us about the presence of mana in the Melanesian Brotherhood? Is it an example of life-giving, life-claiming or life-destroying power? It is when such questions are asked that the possibility and potential for a Melanesian theological response can be formulated, one that is grounded in Melanesian cultural forms yet informed and transformed by the presence of the Gospel.

Such interpretations may see these stories as witnesses to Christ's life-giving and relational power and its consequences at work in Melanesia, witnesses that may in fact be catalysts in compelling Melanesian theology to respond and interpret them anew from a transformed Melanesian experience.

6. *The Melanesian Brotherhood and Mana*

The Melanesian Brotherhood is remarkable because it is an organization that embodies relational power in practice. From the very beginning, its mission, directed towards village communities and identification with Melanesian values, appears to have been

⁴⁴ Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission 1849-1942*, 67.

successful precisely because such key values are embodied in the Brotherhood and in its work beyond. The fact that Brothers are Melanesian, creates a close bond of affection between Brothers and the communities they serve and the humility and grace that they are seen to possess only add to the deep respect people have for them. However, there is still the question of mana. In the previous chapters we have seen just how people's perceptions of their mana are critical in fostering both respect and fear among Melanesians. We also cannot deny that the opportunity to have access to, and to wield, mana is an attractive prospect and a motivating factor for many wanting to join the community.

Here we return to a critical paradox within the Brotherhood. Brothers, many of whom have had little or no formal education and who have few material possessions, find that on becoming a Brother they suddenly command both considerable status and respect. They are admired for being powerful as men of mana, yet they are still expected to live a life of humility embodied in the threefold vow of poverty, chastity and obedience. This is critical in understanding the reason why they are able to work with communities to solve disputes and as peacemakers during the recent conflict. They are able to go where others cannot because on the one hand they demonstrate mana, and on the other possess a humility and grace that Melanesians recognize and admire. Yet the humility and grace are also where the mana is demonstrated as illustrated in Montgomery's story of Brother Francis defusing a potentially violent situation by quietly and humbly praying. The reaction of the militants to this is a clear sign that at least in their eyes, Francis had mana and had to be listened to.⁴⁵

Because of this perception among Anglican Melanesians and beyond, the Brotherhood was able to help lay the foundations for peace at a much deeper level than any outside intervention force. This point seems lost on some of the commentaries written on the conflict where the roles of the Brotherhood and the Church of Melanesia as peacemakers are barely commented on, if at all.⁴⁶ It appears, however, that the Brotherhood, and the mana they are believed to demonstrate, command far more power

⁴⁵ Montgomery, *The Last Heathen: Encounters with Ghosts and Ancestors in Melanesia*, 268.

⁴⁶ See for example Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*; Clive Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failed State in Solomon Islands 1998-2004*.

and respect than any politician, government system or intervention force, thereby making their role critical in the restoration of peace.

The Brotherhood is an example of how relational power operates in a Melanesian context. So for example, a Brother being part of the Brotherhood Community exists only in relation to that Community. They are bound up in a web of relationships with God and with one another which only exists when they are Brothers. Once released from the Order, that special relationship, and the mana that flows from it, are gone. This is why, when an individual Brother breaks his vow, it is seen to impact on the Community: it is interpreted as the cause of some misfortune or other, and vice versa.

Do Brothers have or demonstrate mana? The answer appears to be yes, particularly if we define mana in terms of being able to influence, empower and transmit “truth” to others. It is undeniable that they have considerable power and can demonstrate it, particularly in terms of how people respond to them and what they are able to achieve in their mission work. The mana of the Brotherhood is bound up with relational power operating within the Community but only exists because individual Brothers exist only in relationship to the Community and to God. Yet Brothers are also faced with considerable pressures and temptations as to how they demonstrate or use that mana. The expectation of many Melanesians both inside and outside the Church of Melanesia is that Brothers can wield mana as a form of magical power and they ask Brothers to do so. The constant expectations and requests to demonstrate mana only add to the temptation to abuse their position.

However, if the mana of the Brotherhood flows out from the relationships established between Brothers and with God, then it follows that such mana exists only for the creation of relationships with and for the empowerment of the other. Christ’s mana does not exist for the benefit of Christ and so, similarly, the mana of the Brotherhood does not exist for the benefit of the Brothers. Rather it exists for the creation of community-forming relationships with others and for others. When Brothers attempt to wield or demonstrate mana as a personal possession, or it is individualised as a personal gift of a particular Brother, then it no longer functions as a means to empower or create relationship because it is no longer concerned with the other. Rather it becomes a means to claim and direct power for the building up of the individual. The power of a Brother

to bless or curse in Melanesian societies similarly may lead to the building up of an individual's reputation as "powerful", but when mana is exercised in this way, it is of the individual and therefore not of Christ whose mana is given to the community to be relationship forming.

If mana is manipulated for the personal wants and desires of Brothers it becomes a power at the service of Brothers to use as they see fit. Instead of being empowering or relational it becomes a tool that may seek to dominate, control or threaten the lives of others for the personal benefit of individual Brothers. The result is not the spreading of a life-giving Gospel but rather a life-controlling fear divorced from the real purpose of Christ's mana and the very opposite of Christ's life, ministry and action on the cross.

Yet, alongside this, the Brotherhood is, in itself, the result of an interactive process between the Christianity of the Melanesian Mission and existing Melanesian worldviews. Kopuria founded the Order as a Melanesian profoundly influenced by a Melanesian Christian interaction and was aided by expatriates determined by their experience of this interaction. The development of the Brotherhood was a response to the need for an indigenous Religious Order but also provided an outlet for theological synthesis. In this sense, the Brotherhood is not purely "Melanesian", neither is it purely "European", but a fusion of both. The Brotherhood demonstrates Melanesian qualities but they operate only in relationship to the type of Christianity from which the Order developed. Crucially, however, the synthesis at the heart of the Brotherhood Community cannot be static. Melanesian concepts and theologies develop, change and evolve only in dynamic relationship to each other and by Christ's presence empowering and working through them. The tension in the Brotherhood between a life-giving and a life-claiming mana is a practical example of how theologies and cultural concepts interact and at times jar with each other. Yet the presence of Christ and his life-giving Gospel within also creates the possibilities for theologies to emerge that can at once both challenge and even transform theological reflection and Melanesian experience.

7. The Death of the Brothers: Transformation and Healing

7.1 Transformation

If Christ's mana is involved with the empowerment of the other then I suggest that process of relating to empowerment involves a process of transformation. The Brotherhood's mission and evangelizing work is more than simply identification with Melanesian values. If it aims at the empowerment of the other in the light of the Gospel then it too must involve a process of transformation. To use Loomer's terminology, relational power involves a process of mutual influence.⁴⁷ In other words, the people that Brothers empower are influenced and transformed by them and similarly the Brothers themselves are influenced and transformed by virtue of being part of the relationship. This should be the case if Brothers are operating out of a desire to empower others, but the constant temptations to see mana as something to use or possess for individual benefit does not empower or transform others: rather, it results in a denial of relationship that instead of being mutually empowering, becomes mutually destructive.

What does the death of the seven Brothers contribute to this discussion of mana? I suggest that it offers an opportunity and a challenge for Brothers, Church leaders and Melanesian theologians to try to come to terms with what actually is the mana which Brothers are believed to demonstrate, and for what is its purpose. If it is, as I have suggested, a relational, life-giving power for others, then how do the murders demonstrate this? One answer may be that the realization that Brothers are not invulnerable to physical harm has led to a questioning of mana and its effectiveness in the Brotherhood. Such questioning compels all involved to begin a process of critical examination into not only what and how mana operates but also how it relates to the life-giving mana of Christ.

This thesis is one attempt to do this but it is only made possible by the events of the murders bringing the question of mana sharply into focus. The impact of the killings then needs to be seen in the context of Christ in Melanesia. The acceptance and re-

⁴⁷ Loomer, "Two Kinds of Power," 183-186.

imagining of the old in the light of the Gospel means that Christ embraces, and is part of, the mana concept that gives life to Melanesians; but how far are the murdered Brothers witnesses to the presence of the Gospel transforming that mana concept from within? Is it possible that those deaths have created the conditions for a questioning, challenging and transformation of mana in the Brotherhood and beyond, not so much through their individual actions but through the presence of the Gospel bringing new life and opportunity through a situation of death, a transformation of death into opportunities for life?

The murder of the Brothers was a life-destroying and relationship-destroying event but the presence of Christ as a life-giver creates and renews opportunities for a greater experience and opportunity of life to be shared and experienced by his people. The murders have led to a questioning of mana within the Brotherhood which reveals a tension between a community-forming mana intended to bring life, and a misuse of that mana which exists for the building up of the individual at the expense of community. A situation of death has led to a process for the recognition of mana in the Brotherhood as life-giving as and against forms of mana that restrict or destroy or oppress life.

I suggest that the recognition of both life-giving and life-claiming power in the Brotherhood is also a recognition that Brothers are not simply passive receivers of that power. The mana that Christ gives is life-giving but it relies on the agents of that mana using it as life-giving. Brothers ultimately have a choice of how it is used. Yet the presence of Christ in the mana concept is not static but a continuous process so that when Christ gives mana it is continually being transformed and renewed to empower and create relationships, but when that mana is misused for quite different purposes, the relational process is broken. The breaking of relationship comes, according to Carter Heyward, in the denial of basic human relationships and the refusal to accept human connectedness and reciprocity. God here is relational power who can be born and realized in our lives and when human beings exercise relational power to create relationship they are in fact exercising God and divine power directly, so that the power that creates relationship is not just power from God, but rather God present as power itself.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Carter Heyward, *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God*, 187. And Isabel Carter Heyward, *The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation* (Lanham: University Press Of

What can such a theology offer our situation in Melanesia? Is it possible to conceive of mana operating in the Melanesian Brotherhood as more than simply God's relational and life-giving power, by also being God's actual presence as a life-giver? Does such a theology allow us to conceive of Christ as directly present as that life giving mana? In this way the demonstration of mana is actually the confirmation of God's direct presence empowering and creating relationships from within. In this sense God does not give mana to Brothers; rather he gives himself to be used as a life-creating power, which can empower all. Such a position would lead us to the realization that the misuse of mana as a personal possession is not just the abuse of God's power, but also the abuse of the divine presence, the abuse and refusal of God present with us. The misuse of mana here does more than break relationships with others, it denies relationship to God.

Alongside this, the insights of process theology, explored in the previous chapter, may also be helpful in enabling a conception of God as dynamically involved in and through events in Melanesia. God is present in cultures which, and people whom, he has created but the divine presence is also open to the experiences and continuous possibilities for expressing that presence in Melanesian terms. The development of a Melanesian Gospel is a creative process where theologians are working out the implications of God's presence in creative ways that expand the possibilities of that presence. While God both informs and influences that process, the divine is also influenced by the new possibilities and potentialities that are worked out to expand the possibilities of Christ's presence and how he is experienced by Melanesians.

The Melanesian Brotherhood may be a concrete example of this in that if Christ's mana is God's actual presence then God is continually transforming and renewing the divine presence in response to events and experiences within the Brotherhood and beyond. When mana is misused it is a misuse of God and the relational process fractures, but the presence of God does not force or coerce Brothers to use mana in the way that God expects. The giving of mana to Brothers is part of a relational process where Christ gives himself as an invitation to share in his life-giving presence. It is an opening up of the divine for the enrichment of the Brotherhood community who receive God as life

America, 1982). See also Purvis, *The Power of the Cross: Foundations for a Christian Feminist Ethic of Community*, 40-41.

and then have the responsibility to give that life to others. The giving and opening up of Christ is crucial because if God's nature is to be relational and seek relationship with his creatures, then to be truly part of a relational process involves an opening up of oneself to the other. A relational process involves genuine freedom, creativity, enrichment but also the risk of rejection and humiliation. The misuse of mana is the rejection of the potential and possibilities that Christ's life-giving power and presence provide and its distortion into life-claiming and life-destroying power.

However, despite the refusal and distortion, Christ remains a dynamic and continuous presence within the Brotherhood and the Church as mana. If Christ is, by his very nature, relational, then he is continuing to transform and renew opportunities for the restoration and recreation of relationships wherever possible. If God's nature is to invite and create relational life-giving mana then God cannot co-exist passively alongside broken relationships that distort who God is. Rather, the giving of Christ to humanity in relationship is a fundamental commitment of God to relationships that give life even in the midst of rejection and death. Such a commitment means that God is opposed to any misuse of power that destroys or oppresses life and wherever God is present there must be relationship or a working process to restore or recreate relationship that recreates life. God is actively working through situations and events that create opportunities for relationships to be re-established. Christ is at the heart of this process. When broken on the cross, he creates the conditions for loving relationships to exist and for life-giving power to flow through them. God is profoundly involved in the creation of relationships, the consequences of their destruction at the hands of human beings and in their subsequent recreation and transformation.

The presence of Christ in the creation and destruction of relationship means that there is a divine experience of both. The consequences of broken relationships are felt and experienced by God who, in a creative process, works to recreate them. This according to Suchocki results in a co-experiencing of God and humanity. God feels the world with us and we, as human beings, in some limited way can feel the world with God.⁴⁹ God as the transformer and creator of life giving relationships is inviting humanity to share in and experience that life which, in turn, transforms humanity into life-givers.

⁴⁹ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology*, 159-160. See also Suchocki, *God Christ Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology*, 115.

In this way, the deaths of the Brothers can be interpreted not as God forsaking the Brotherhood or punishing them for failing to follow the rules and procedures of the community, nor as some kind of sacrificial violence necessary for the recreation of relationship or renewal of life as demanded in a biocosmic worldview. Rather, it was the consequence of a brutal refusal and denial of life, the result of opening up oneself for relationship and being destroyed as a result. This destruction of relationship is not the result of God willing violence in order to create life but rather God working through a life-denying situation effected by his creatures to recreate relationships in the Brotherhood that expand and transform the meaning and boundaries of mana as life-giving. It may reveal that mana is not power to be claimed, but rather is the presence of Christ who enters history to empower others and to allow the conditions for that empowerment by transforming all that denies or restricts that process.

7.2 Healing

There is no doubt that this period has been the most traumatic in the Brotherhood's history. At the height of the conflict Brothers found themselves witnessing brutal atrocities and murders and, with very little opportunity to deal with the trauma, they found it difficult to come to terms with what they had witnessed. Carter recalls the words of one Brother who had witnessed two violent murders:

After this I felt so angry. Why had they done these things? I felt suspicious of everyone. I was afraid to speak to anyone about what I had seen. I could not forgive what I had seen. I felt unable to eat and tried to forget so I could feel peaceful again” (sic) My whole body felt sick at the terrible evil things I had seen done to another person.⁵⁰

During the trauma counselling of 2004, Hosking describes how some Brothers, when sharing their experiences, felt a shattering of assumptions, particularly in relation to coming to terms with the murder of fellow Brothers. Carter records how it felt almost impossible to turn that situation of death into one of hope.⁵¹ Yet a process of healing

⁵⁰ Richard Carter, "Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking in Solomon Islands, with Particular Reference to the Role of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious Communities", B: 3.

⁵¹ Stephen Crittenden, "The Religion Report: Melanesian Brotherhood Murders," Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

has begun and this is illustrated in Brother Alfred's struggles to forgive his captors on the Weather Coast:

I'm angry with them, and I say I don't want to forgive them. The rebels and militants that was captured and been in the prison, there was more letters been sent to me, more letters, ask for forgiveness. When I read those letters "oh please brothers forgive us and we need you to come into prison to help us" it's really make my mind angry. So I just burn all the letters and leave it alone. But somehow, yes, we have to accept them, as a Christian we have to accept them and forgive them.⁵²

Here, in the struggles of Br Alfred, there is a desire to accept and forgive but it is a desire struggling against strong emotions of felt anger and loss. Yet if the Brotherhood is a Community of relational life giving power, then it is also a Community of shared experience so that while the sense of pain and loss is deeply felt by virtue of their interconnectedness, therein also lies the opportunity for a shared mutual healing. This is possible through the presence of Christ as mana, sharing in the experience of that Community while continually creating the conditions for life-giving and healing mana to flow, not only for the empowerment of others, but also for the renewal and strengthening of relationships from within.

The shared experience of Brothers is an example of what European theologians Percy and Nouwen refer to as the taking on of affliction. The experience of pain and loss felt by individual Brothers is shared by all in the Community, including Christ present as mana who, through those experiences, creates the opportunities for a healing process. Crucially, however, this can only be effective when all members of the Brotherhood are able to acknowledge their role in an inherently relational process. Their experience of Christ's presence as mana depends on their willingness to be in relationship to others within the Community and to those they are called to serve. The healing presence of Christ is communal: it is not about the healing of individuals but rather the Community who experience pain and loss as members of an interconnected whole and who can equally experience healing in a similar way.

⁵² Ibid.

Here the presence of Christ in the Brotherhood is communal, which can only be experienced in its fullness by being open to the opportunities for life-giving relationship to others. The Brothers' demonstration of this life-giving power depends on their belonging to Community and relational process, so that when Brothers use Christ's mana to empower or heal, they also share in the empowerment and healing by virtue of entering into a relationship of experience to and for the other. The very action of relationship implies an experience of relating to and sharing in each other, and the presence of Christ within ensures that those doing the empowering are equally empowered by that experience of giving and receiving. When Christ empowers Brothers for ministry, they are members of a Community that effectively share that empowerment with each other by virtue of being part of an interconnected whole. Brothers can share in each other's pain but also in the life-giving and healing power of Christ that exists within and between them.

However, this shared experience of power depends on Brothers being open to the presence of Christ as life-giving and not life-claiming. The claiming of power is detrimental to this process because it is of no benefit to the Community. Rather it builds up the individual who cuts himself off from the potential and opportunities for sharing life-giving power in Christ and with each other. When Brothers work to empower and heal both people and communities, they enter relationship and the experiences of others. Any empowerment or healing that takes place does so because of Christ's presence as mana working through them. This is only possible when Brothers give themselves to others in relationship to serve. Empowerment comes here in the giving of oneself to the other and crucially it is the giving of Christ as mana to the other. Paradoxically, it is the giving away of mana that empowers Brothers with mana, because it is Christ who is given to empower others but Christ's presence as mana remains within the Community as life-giving to the Brotherhood. Mana is to be given as Christ to others but it also remains as Christ's constant presence in the Brotherhood itself.

The giving of mana is also a sharing in the experience of the other, meaning that once relationships are created and empowered, that process will equally transform and empower all who are involved in the relationship including the agents of that empowerment. Consequently Brothers themselves are equally transformed and empowered by the mana that they give to others which is life-giving to all involved in

that relationship. The dynamic and transforming nature of Christ's presence as mana ensures that there is a continual renewal and empowerment of relationships which benefit all.

8. Conclusion

8.1 The Melanesian Brotherhood and Christ's Presence as Mana: Some Implications

If we can work from the premise that mana is Christ's active presence in the Brotherhood and beyond then there are a number of important implications and areas for further theological development.

First, this thesis has posited a largely positive view of mana and argued that this is important to any development of theology in Melanesia. I have suggested that mana as a means to life is a key issue in Melanesian theology and one that has considerable potential for future theological reflection and in the continuous task of developing a Melanesian Gospel. The potential comes not in the rejection of mana as power, or in some kind of tenuous balancing act between power and vulnerability, but rather in the embracing of mana as transformed by Christ as a means to life. This recognition of Christ as mana is transformed and expanded by the presence of a Melanesian Gospel which inspires the development of theology, and works out and explores the implications of this. While this thesis is one attempt to do this by exploring mana in the Melanesian Brotherhood as a means to life in Christ, it is by no means an exhaustive study. The role of mana is prevalent in Melanesian worldviews across Melanesia and the synthesis between Christianity and Melanesian cultures ensures that mana continues to function in fluid and evolving theological contexts. I have focused my study on one Religious Community in one particular Christian denomination in Solomon Islands, but Melanesian concepts including mana are not exclusive to the Brotherhood: they touch and are part of all Melanesian Christians regardless of denomination or culture. Wherever there is Melanesian theology, there is theological synthesis and the potential for Melanesian concepts to be sources for, or even the foundation of, a Melanesian Gospel that embraces and transforms them.

Secondly, if Brothers are giving Christ's mana to empower others, then those empowered are not passive receivers either. Christ's power and presence is meant to be shared by all and, as a dynamic presence, it compels all to be renewed and transformed by its power and potential. Mana exists for the creation and empowerment of relationships that are life-giving, and when it operates in this way, it is a concrete example of Christ's presence in those communities. The process of sharing Christ's presence, however, is continuous and goes beyond the scope of the Melanesian Brotherhood. Brothers can empower communities, but the mana that empowers is not exclusive to them; rather the Brothers are vehicles for Christ's life-giving power but it cannot be reduced to them. Brothers give power but it is power to be used by the receiver as life-giving for others and it remains continuously life-giving and dynamic by Christ's presence within.

Thirdly, if mana is Christ's presence, and the creation or transformation of life-giving relationships is, in itself, an act of mana, then Christ is available to all as mana. The Melanesian Brotherhood demonstrates mana because, as a Religious Community the Brothers' lives are set aside for God's ministry, but Christ's mana exists anywhere life-giving relationships are practised. Mana is not an exclusive attribute or characteristic of any particular group; rather it exists and is available for empowerment of all God's people in community.

Mana is not just a dramatic demonstration of power to compel all to believe in a God of powerful and mighty acts, either. Rather, mana can be as powerful or effective when manifest in the lives of ordinary Christians living their lives for others in their own villages and communities across Melanesia. It is mana which sustains and gives life to communities and binds people together within. This is an active demonstration of God's presence as mana because wherever there is relationship to others God exists to empower that relationship as life-giving mana. If this is the case, then Christ's mana in a Melanesian context has undergone a significant transformation from a life-claiming to a life-giving power which is available to all who are open to its potential.

Such an understanding should have a considerable impact on all those believed to demonstrate mana, including members of the Melanesian Brotherhood, other Religious Communities, clergy in the Church of Melanesia, senior Church leaders and so on, and

people's expectations of them. The status and reputations of Brothers, for example, are built upon who they are as members of the Brotherhood and what they can achieve as demonstrators of God's mana. Yet, in the light of God's presence as mana, is it possible that Brothers, many of whom are from humble backgrounds, already have mana before even joining the Brotherhood simply by being active members of their own Christian communities which are themselves demonstrators of Christ's presence as mana? Can we talk of the most humble in Melanesian communities demonstrating mana by living for others? The possibilities of Christ's mana existing in Christian communities apart from the Melanesian Brotherhood, the Priesthood and other Religious Communities represents a significant challenge to Brothers and others in the Church who wish to claim it as exclusive to the Brotherhood. Christ's presence as mana, does not ensure status or reputation. Rather it ensures the giving away of both to empower all, including the most humble in societies.

Seen in this context, when Brothers give mana to the other, it is the giving away of power, status and reputation. It is a letting go of power to be claimed as exclusive to the Community and an act of opening up the mana concept for others by expanding its possibilities and potential in the lives of Christians living in community.

The possibility of a transforming mana outside the Brotherhood may create the conditions for a transformation of mana from within the Brotherhood itself. The transforming power of Christ as mana may not only work from within the Brotherhood but also in the lives and examples of his people outside the community who demonstrate it in their everyday lives. They may well be people with very little power or status but the possibilities of mana working through them may challenge the expectations of what mana is and the power and status that comes with it. It may also mean that when mana is used to threaten or to create fear among people, it is confronted by the mana of Christ operating in the most humble who may touch and transform life-denying power into life-giving power, by virtue of Christ's presence within them.

These are implications that come out of the possibilities of Christ's transformation of mana and which could be developed or worked out in further theological reflection. The continuous development of a Melanesian Gospel and its working out in Melanesian theology creates exciting possibilities for the implications of Christ in Melanesia. The

theological reflection here is the attempt to offer Melanesian theology a way of doing that and, more specifically, to suggest how mana can be interpreted as a concrete sign of God's presence in Melanesia in ways that can both affirm and challenge its use in the Melanesian Brotherhood and beyond.

8.2 Christ's Presence as Mana: Some Implications Beyond Melanesia

The contextual theology I have developed here is a response to the use of mana in the Melanesian Brotherhood and its treatment in Melanesian theology, yet my examination of what Melanesian theology actually is has implications not only for Melanesian theology working out the implications of Christ's presence in Melanesia but also for non-Melanesian and, more specifically, European theologies of power.

Despite the immense diversity of missionaries, their methods, denominations and personalities and various Melanesian responses to them, most of the European missionaries came to Melanesia from a context of power. They were largely the products of the nineteenth century, a period marked by the expansion of European influence and power around the world. The scientific and technological advances of the age often led to an assumption that "Western culture" and "Western religion" were superior and that conversion to Christianity was synonymous with Western civilisation.⁵³ Importantly, too, it was often assumed that the theologies that missionaries represented could be applied universally to all contexts. They were, however, contextual theologies extending theological reflection beyond their own contexts, seemingly unaware of how culturally relative they were to European context.⁵⁴

The coming of missionaries to Melanesia resulted in the introduction of theologies of power interacting with existing theologies of power in Melanesian worldviews. This power encounter occurred simply by the presence of the missionary demonstrating a seemingly superior technical and material culture.⁵⁵ The result argues, Paroi, in that encounter between different ideologies, perceptions of life, meanings and values is that

⁵³ Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, 230. See also Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 479.

⁵⁴ Schreier, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local*, 2.

⁵⁵ See May, *Transcendence and Violence: The Encounter of Buddhist, Christian and Primal Traditions*, 43.

the stronger dominates the weaker. The stronger is able to absorb the weaker into itself and the weaker will adapt or borrow cultural traits from the stronger.⁵⁶ Is this a fair representation of what has occurred in Melanesia? Is Melanesian theology an example of a stronger European dialogue partner dominating the interpretation of events in Melanesia?

While it may be true to say that expatriates from various European theological traditions have dominated and provided the impetus for the developing of Melanesian theology, that theology is in a continual state of becoming. The constant interaction between the recognition and developing of a Melanesian Gospel and its interaction with Melanesian theology is continually changing the parameters and boundaries of theological reflection. Melanesian theology is the result of the interaction between the received Christianity and the Melanesian response, but that interaction has meant that what is “European” and what is “Melanesian” has changed to the extent that what develops is neither purely a European transfer or purely traditional Melanesian, but a new transformation of theology located in Melanesia.

Likewise, the contexts and worldviews of both Melanesians and expatriates are fundamentally altered by the interaction between them. Any theology which develops from this will be the result of the interaction between contexts and worldviews coming to terms with these changes and can be powerfully transformative if addressed skilfully and courageously.

This is important because if this has been the case in Melanesia, a similar situation would apply if the insights of Melanesian or any other non-European theology were applied to European theological traditions and contexts. The interaction between them would fundamentally change what is European.

In marked contrast to the world of the nineteenth century missionary, European theology is now suffering, in various degrees, a crisis of power. The rise of individualism over and against hierarchical structures of authority and conformity, the failure of humanist rationalism in creating a prosperous world for all, and the misuse

⁵⁶ Paroi, "Theoretical Models of Missionary Activity of the Church and a Need for Contextualisation," 116.

and abuse of power in Church structures in various contexts are examples of what has led to a suspicion and general lack of confidence in both European Christianity and Christian authority. Theologians writing about power in such a context often identify it with forms of negative domination or control and seek to posit a more positive form of power as relational. The shift from concepts of power as domination to that of relation is significant in that it creates the possibility of being open to and influenced by alternative models of God and theological reflection that are being developed in non-Western contexts.

When Loomer makes the distinction between unilateral and relational power he argues that the essential difference is that unilateral power is concerned with creating the largest effect on the other while being minimally influenced by that other. Relational power, on the other hand, is the capacity to sustain a mutually internal relationship, the capacity to influence and be influenced by the other in relationship. If such a concept of power is adapted and applied to theological reflection then it allows for a number of implications or potentialities:

First, any transformation of power from domination to relation implies a significant change in how one relates to the other. The continuous development of Melanesian theology and the changing roles of expatriates and those actually engaged in doing theology implies a shift in power away from expatriates and the traditions they represent to Melanesians making sense of the presence of Christ within their own experience. In such a context, the expatriates need to be open to the new possibilities which Melanesian theological reflection may provide. In a sense roles have been reversed. It is now a question of the expatriate not only supporting Melanesian theology and the development of a Melanesian Gospel but also receiving it as Christ's transforming presence. Expatriates become the receivers of the insights of that local theology which offer alternative models of God and the world which challenge or even transform their own theological reflection and that of their own context.

Secondly, the willingness to influence and be influenced calls for an essential openness. The development of relational power calls for an openness to the perspectives and possibilities of the other. The recognition that European theology is, in itself, a number

of contextual theologies as relative as any other, allows for the possibility of being open to the new perspectives and alternatives the other might provide.

For example, the search for a relational power in European theology would suggest the desire to move from an individualistic to a communal sense of power, and if so what would Melanesian concepts of self, deriving meaning from community and relationship, have to say to them? Or in societies that have largely internalised spirituality and God as a personal saviour of the individual, what can Melanesian concepts of life, its essential relatedness to spirituality and a notion of God who is present in both physical and social existence as relationships and communities, have to offer? The development of relational power requires not only openness but a sense of taking risks. If contextual theologies are prepared to enter into a relationship of risk where cherished theological concepts may be questioned, challenged or even undermined by the other, or a relationship of vulnerability that lays bare the weaknesses and relativity of a theological position, then the potential exists for a mutual enriching and sharing of theological and cultural concepts. This might add a new and dynamic element that has the potential to develop as a new and transforming theology.

Thirdly, the working out of God's presence in Melanesia, through Melanesian experience, is obviously "Melanesian", but that experience has been changed by its interaction with the received Christianity. The categories of what is European and what is Melanesian do not easily apply here because the two have interacted fundamentally with each other. What is Melanesian now is not the same as what Melanesian meant before the coming of Christianity. The encounter with missionaries changed that irreversibly. In a similar way, the experience of expatriates writing theology in Melanesia is influenced by their interaction with Melanesians and Melanesian concepts. The theology that they write is not indigenous "Melanesian" but their experience of Melanesia means that it is not purely "European" either and they are colleagues in the development of Melanesian theology. It is a question of various levels or intensities of belonging that interact and enable a moving beyond a simple categorisation of one or the other.

With this in mind what happens if we use the insights of Melanesian theology to gain a new perspective on the issue of power in European theology? Could it be that the

contextual theology that may develop would in one sense be neither European nor Melanesian, but rather a synthesis that adds something new and dynamic to the theology, by making it more than simply European, while creating the potential to add new light on the conversation partner to make it more than simply Melanesian? There might here be the possibility that in the interaction between contextual theologies, new theological reflection can be created that goes beyond the boundaries of context. The new contextual theologies that emerge are inter-contextual, inter-cultural and inter-experiential, adding a transforming presence to all contexts involved in its conception, simply by the interaction of contexts which, although culturally relative, have a contribution and new perspective to add to the discussion.

The interaction between contexts may actually create a contextual synthesis that may go beyond the usual contextual perimeters by adding something new and dynamic to each context by virtue of the synthesis itself. In this way, the identity, context, experience and sense of belonging of the participants shape who they are but the interaction with others of different identities, contexts, experience and sense of belonging, enable them to be more than who they are. The interaction will change them and the theology they write by being exposed to new potentialities in the cultures and the people they encounter. The interaction of contextual theology may lead to the mutual transformation of all involved in the process, but this can only be possible if contexts and cultures are willing to be involved in a relational process that will benefit all.

Appendix I: Research Project Interview Schedule

This project will involve the interviewing of three main categories of people:

1. Public Church Leaders
2. Members of the Melanesian Brotherhood
3. Parishoners of the Church of Melanesia

The interviews will be semi-structured and the interview topics will be as follows:

1. People's perceptions of the Melanesian Brothers possessing spiritual power or *mana*. I am interested to hear how that power is and has been demonstrated, its use and/or abuse, and the Brothers own perception of it.
2. The role of the Brotherhood as peacemakers during the recent "ethnic" conflict. Why were the Brothers so successful in encouraging and restoring peace? What were the factors that enabled this? How much was/is the *mana* of the Brothers a factor in this (if at all)?
3. The impact of the death of the seven Brothers on the Melanesian Brotherhood. What is the impact on the community, what theological issues are raised in relation to *mana*? How is their murder being perceived and interpreted theologically by both Brothers, those connected to them and those from other Church communities? How much is the restoration of peace on the Weather Coast attributed to their deaths?

Appendix II: Participant Information Sheet 1

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY



THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
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Facsimile 64 9 373 7015 (External)
84015 (Internal)

The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, New Zealand

Participant Information Sheet **(Members of the Melanesian Brotherhood)**

To:

Title: A Theology of Reconciliation after Ethnic Conflict in the Solomon Islands with Special Reference to the Martyrdom of John Coleridge Patteson and the Work of the Melanesian Brotherhood.

My name is Matthew Jones and I am a student at the University of Auckland enrolled in the Doctoral programme in the School of Theology. I am conducting this research for the purpose of writing my Doctoral thesis which is due for submission in 2007/2008. I have chosen this area of research because of its immediate relevance to the current situation in Solomon Islands after ethnic conflict and because of the fact that very little has been written on the conflict from a theological point of view. I have chosen to focus on the Melanesian Brotherhood in particular, because of the role they played in peacemaking and of the significance and impact of the martyrdom of seven Brothers on the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal. I am inviting you to participate in my research by agreeing to be interviewed.

The interview will focus on the Melanesian Brotherhood, their spiritual power or 'mana', their role as peacemakers during the ethnic conflict and the theological impact of the death of the seven brothers on the Brotherhood itself.

The research will be supported financially by a scholarship from the Church of Melanesia and copies of the thesis when completed will be kept at the headquarters of the Church in Honiara and at Bishop Patteson Theological College, Kohimarama.

If you agree to be interviewed a Consent form will be supplied to you to sign before the interview takes place. I anticipate that the interview, which will involve me taking down notes, will take up to one hour. I would also like to record the interview for the purposes of taking notes afterwards, however this is optional and you have the right to decide whether you want to be recorded or not. Even if you agree to being taped, you may however choose to have the recorder turned off at any time.

The information you provide in the interview will be used solely for the writing of my thesis and will be locked securely in a cupboard in my study at St John's College and any notes and recorded tapes will be destroyed after the thesis has been examined.

Your name will not be used in the thesis apart from a general acknowledgement, and if the information you provide is reported or published, this will be done in a way that does not identify you as its source. You will also see in the Consent form that you can withdraw any information you have provided by 30th of June 2005. There will also be no financial payments involved in the interviews.

I do not anticipate any risks to the Church or to yourself and the process of ensuring confidentiality adopted above, should minimize any such potential risks.

Thank you very much for your time and help in making this study possible. If you have any queries or wish to know more, contact me at The Church of Melanesia, PO Box 19, Honiara, Solomon Islands or phone 21892 or email: mat.sol@xtra.co.nz or write to me, or my Supervisor, or the Head of School at the addresses below:

My address is: Mr Matthew Jones
The College of St John the Evangelist
202-214 St John's Road
Meadowbank
Auckland, 1005
NEW ZEALAND

My Supervisor is: Dr Neil Darragh
Catholic Institute of Theology
University of Auckland
16 Waterloo Quadrant
City
Auckland, NEW ZEALAND

Phone: (09) 379 6424 extn 725
Fax: (09) 379 6426

The Head of School is: Professor Elaine Wainwright
School of Theology
University of Auckland
Private Bag, 92019
Fisher Building, Level 3
18 Waterloo Quadrant
Auckland, NEW ZEALAND

Phone: (09) 373 7599 extn 86673
Fax: (09) 373 7015

For any queries regarding ethical concerns please contact:

The Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office-Office of the Vice Chancellor, Private Bag 92019, Auckland. Telephone (64) 09 373-7599 extn. 87830.

**APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN
PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE on.....for a period
of....., from.../.../.../
Reference...../.....**

Appendix III: Participant Information Sheet 2

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY



THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
NEW ZEALAND

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Auckland, New Zealand
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Facsimile 64 9 373 7015 (External)
84015 (Internal)

The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, New Zealand

Participant Information Sheet **(Public Church Leaders)**

To:

Title: A Theology of Reconciliation after Ethnic Conflict in the Solomon Islands with Special Reference to the Martyrdom of John Coleridge Patteson and the Work of the Melanesian Brotherhood.

My name is Matthew Jones and I am a student at the University of Auckland enrolled in the Doctoral programme in the School of Theology. I am conducting this research for the purpose of writing my Doctoral thesis which is due for submission in 2007/2008. I have chosen this area of research because of its immediate relevance to the current situation in Solomon Islands after ethnic conflict and because of the fact that very little has been written on the conflict from a theological point of view. I have chosen to focus on the Melanesian Brotherhood in particular, because of the role they played in peacemaking and of the significance and impact of the martyrdom of seven Brothers on the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal. I am inviting you to participate in my research by agreeing to be interviewed.

The interview will focus on the Melanesian Brotherhood, their spiritual power or 'mana', their role as peacemakers during the ethnic conflict and the theological impact of the death of the seven brothers on the Brotherhood itself.

The research will be supported financially by a scholarship from the Church of Melanesia and copies of the thesis when completed will be kept at the headquarters of the Church in Honiara and at Bishop Patteson Theological College, Kohimarama.

If you agree to be interviewed a Consent form will be supplied to you to sign before the interview takes place. I anticipate that the interview, which will involve me taking down notes, will take up to one hour. I would also like to record the interview for the purposes of taking notes afterwards, however this is optional and you have the right to decide whether you want to be recorded or not. Even if you agree to being taped, you may however choose to have the recorder turned off at any time.

The information you provide in the interview will be used solely for the writing of my thesis and will be locked securely in a cupboard in my study at St John's College and any notes and recorded tapes will be destroyed after the thesis has been examined.

Although your name will not be used in the thesis apart from a general acknowledgement, due to your position as a public figure in the Church it may be possible that the information that you provide may be identifiable to you. However I do not anticipate any risks to the Church or to yourself. You will also see in the Consent form that you can withdraw any information you have provided by 30th of May 2005. There will also be no financial payments involved in the interviews.

Thank you very much for your time and help in making this study possible. If you have any queries or wish to know more, contact me at The Church of Melanesia, PO Box 19, Honiara, Solomon Islands or phone 21892 or email: mat.sol@xtra.co.nz or write to me, or my Supervisor, or the Head of School at the addresses below:

My address is: Mr Matthew Jones
The College of St John the Evangelist
202-214 St John's Road
Meadowbank
Auckland, 1005
NEW ZEALAND

My Supervisor is: Dr Neil Darragh
Catholic Institute of Theology
University of Auckland
16 Waterloo Quadrant
City
Auckland, NEW ZEALAND

Phone: (09) 379 6424 extn 725
Fax: (09) 379 6426

The Head of School is: Professor Elaine Wainwright
School of Theology
University of Auckland
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Phone: (09) 373 7599 extn 86673
Fax: (09) 373 7015

For any queries regarding ethical concerns please contact:

The Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office-Office of the Vice Chancellor, Private Bag 92019, Auckland. Telephone (64) 09 373-7599 extn. 87830.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE on.....for a period of....., from.../.../.... Reference...../.....

Appendix IV: Participant Information Sheet 3

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY



THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
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84015 (Internal)

The University of Auckland
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Auckland, New Zealand

Participant Information Sheet **(Parishioners of the Church of Melanesia)**

To:

Title: A Theology of Reconciliation after Ethnic Conflict in the Solomon Islands with Special Reference to the Martyrdom of John Coleridge Patteson and the Work of the Melanesian Brotherhood.

My name is Matthew Jones and I am a student at the University of Auckland enrolled in the Doctoral programme in the School of Theology. I am conducting this research for the purpose of writing my Doctoral thesis which is due for submission in 2007/2008. I have chosen this area of research because of its immediate relevance to the current situation in Solomon Islands after ethnic conflict and because of the fact that very little has been written on the conflict from a theological point of view. I have chosen to focus on the Melanesian Brotherhood in particular, because of the role they played in peacemaking and of the significance and impact of the martyrdom of seven Brothers on the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal. I am inviting you to participate in my research by agreeing to be interviewed.

The interview will focus on the Melanesian Brotherhood, their spiritual power or 'mana', their role as peacemakers during the ethnic conflict and the theological impact of the death of the seven brothers on the Brotherhood itself.

The research will be supported financially by a scholarship from the Church of Melanesia and copies of the thesis when completed will be kept at the headquarters of the Church in Honiara and at Bishop Patteson Theological College, Kohimarama.

If you agree to be interviewed a Consent form will be supplied to you to sign before the interview takes place. I anticipate that the interview, which will involve me taking down notes, will take up to one hour. I would also like to record the interview for the purposes of taking notes afterwards, however this is optional and you have the right to decide whether you want to be recorded or not. Even if you agree to being taped, you may however choose to have the recorder turned off at any time.

The information you provide in the interview will be used solely for the writing of my thesis and will be locked securely in a cupboard in my study at St John's College and any notes and recorded tapes will be destroyed after the thesis has been examined.

Your name will not be used in the thesis apart from a general acknowledgement, and if the information you provide is reported or published, this will be done in a way that does not identify you as its source. You will also see in the Consent form that you can withdraw any information you have provided by 30th of June 2005. There will also be no financial payments involved in the interviews.

I do not anticipate any risks to the Church or to yourself and the process of ensuring confidentiality adopted above, should minimize any such potential risks.

Thank you very much for your time and help in making this study possible. If you have any queries or wish to know more, contact me at The Church of Melanesia, PO Box 19, Honiara, Solomon Islands or phone 21892 or email: mat.sol@xtra.co.nz or write to me, or my Supervisor, or the Head of School at the addresses below:

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University of Auckland
16 Waterloo Quadrant
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The Head of School is: Professor Elaine Wainwright
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Fax: (09) 373 7015

For any queries regarding ethical concerns please contact:

The Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office-Office of the Vice Chancellor, Private Bag 92019, Auckland. Telephone (64) 09 373-7599 extn. 87830.

**APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN
PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE on.....for a period
of....., from.../.../.../
Reference...../.....**

Appendix V: Consent Form 1

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY



THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
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The University of Auckland
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Auckland, New Zealand

CONSENT FORM **(For Members of the Melanesian Brotherhood)**

THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF SIX YEARS

Title: A Theology of Reconciliation after Ethnic Conflict in the Solomon Islands with Special Reference to the Martyrdom of John Coleridge Patteson and the Work of the Melanesian Brotherhood.

Researcher: **Matthew Jones**

I have been given a Participant Information Sheet and have read and understood the explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered. This agreement may be revised or amended at my request.

I agree/do not agree that I will be audio taped and understand that, even if I agree I may choose to have the recorder turned off at any time.

I understand that any audio recordings made will be used solely for the writing of the thesis, will be securely stored and locked in the researchers study and will be destroyed after the thesis is examined.

I understand that my name will not be used in the research apart from a general acknowledgement and if the information I provide is reported or published this will be done in a way that does not identify me as its source.

I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information traceable to me at any time before the 30th of June 2005 without giving a reason for my withdrawal.

I agree to take part in this research.

Signed:

Name:
(Please print clearly)

Date:

**APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS
ETHICS COMMITTEE**

**On.....for a period of.....years, from...../...../.....
Reference...../.....**

(This section is to be completed **after** advice of approval has been received from the UAHPEC, and **before** the sheet is given to prospective subjects)

Appendix VI: Consent Form 2

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY



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84015 (Internal)

The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, New Zealand

CONSENT FORM **(For Public Church Leaders)**

THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF SIX YEARS

Title : A Theology of Reconciliation after Ethnic Conflict in the Solomon Islands with Special Reference to the Martyrdom of John Coleridge Patteson and the Work of the Melanesian Brotherhood.

Researcher: **Matthew Jones**

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I understand that any audio recordings made will be used solely for the writing of the thesis, will be securely stored and locked in the researchers study and will be destroyed after the thesis is examined.

I understand that my name will not be used in the research apart from a general acknowledgement but I am also aware that due to my position as a public figure in the Church it may be possible that any information that I provide may be identifiable to me.

I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information traceable to me at any time before the 30th of June 2005 without giving a reason for my withdrawal.

I agree to take part in this research.

Signed:

Name:
(Please print clearly)

Date:

**APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS
ETHICS COMMITTEE**

On.....for a period of.....years, from...../...../.....

Reference...../.....

(This section is to be completed **after** advice of approval has been received from the UAHPEC, and **before** the sheet is given to prospective subjects)

Appendix VII: Consent Form 3

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY



THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
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CONSENT FORM

(For Parishioners of the Church of Melanesia)

THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF SIX YEARS

Title: A Theology of Reconciliation after Ethnic Conflict in the Solomon Islands with Special Reference to the Martyrdom of John Coleridge Patteson and the Work of the Melanesian Brotherhood.

Researcher: **Matthew Jones**

I have been given a Participant Information Sheet and have read and understood the explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered. This agreement may be revised or amended at my request.

I agree/do not agree that I will be audio taped and understand that, even if I agree I may choose to have the recorder turned off at any time.

I understand that any audio recordings made will be used solely for the writing of the thesis, will be securely stored and locked in the researchers study and will be destroyed after the thesis is examined.

I understand that my name will not be used in the research apart from a general acknowledgement and if the information I provide is reported or published this will be done in a way that does not identify me as its source.

I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information traceable to me at any time before the 30th of June 2005 without giving a reason for my withdrawal.

I agree to take part in this research.

Signed:

Name:
(Please print clearly)

Date:

**APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS
ETHICS COMMITTEE**

**On.....for a period of.....years, from...../...../.....
Reference...../.....**

(This section is to be completed **after** advice of approval has been received from the UAHPEC, and **before** the sheet is given to prospective subjects)

Appendix VIII: Interview Questions

Section One: The Melanesian Brotherhood and Mana

1. What do you think are the most important qualities of the Brotherhood?
2. Are the Brothers popular, revered and respected by Solomon Islanders? And if so why? Is it because of these qualities?
3. Do Brothers, in your view, possess or demonstrate *mana* and if so what kind of *mana* is it?
4. What is the purpose of this *mana*?
5. How is this *mana* demonstrated and used? Is it used positively or negatively or both?
6. Do you know of any examples of Brothers using or demonstrating such *mana*? Have you yourself felt, used or demonstrated *mana*?
7. How do people interpret *mana*? Is it respected, feared or both?
8. Do all Brothers possess this power or some more than others?

Section Two: Peacemaking and Ethnic Conflict

9. Were the Brothers successful in encouraging and restoring peace during the recent “ethnic” conflict and if so why?
10. Was their possession of *mana* a factor in this?
11. How was the *mana* of the Melanesian Brotherhood demonstrated during the conflict? Do you know of any specific examples of Brothers demonstrating

mana while peacemaking? Were you involved in peacemaking and if so did you feel or demonstrate *mana*?

12. How do you think the conflict has affected the Brotherhood?

Section Three: The Murder of the Seven Brothers and Mana

13. What do you think has been the impact of the death of the seven Brothers on the Brotherhood community?
14. How are their deaths being interpreted by the Church and wider community? Has the Brothers own view of *mana* changed since their deaths or stayed the same?
15. Have their deaths affected, altered or changed people's perceptions of the Brotherhood's *mana*?

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