

# **TOWARDS AN ECOTHEOLOGY FOR PNG – RELATING BIBLICAL ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP WITH THE MELANESIAN CULTURAL CONCEPT OF INSEPARABILITY AND INTERRELATEDNESS OF HUMANKIND AND NATURE**

**Timothy Kwara**

*Timothy Kwara, from Central Province, has served CLTC since 2000, at first, as Registrar, then as Assistant Dean of Distance Theological Education. In 2013, he commenced his Master of Theology degree, and will graduate this year. He had previously worked as a reporter with several newspapers, and has worked with the Bible Society and Bible Translation Association of PNG.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Ecotheology is a significant issue, which was practised during the “roots” period (1796-1880) and “shoots” period (1840-1900) in the South Pacific, but, during those times, it was an unheard-of term.<sup>1</sup> When the first missionaries entered the Pacific in the 1830s, they showed great interest in ethnography and anthropology. However, secular scientists now dominate environmental studies, leaving God out of the picture.

In recent times, Pacific theologians have shown great interest in the environment, thus contextualising the issue. During the pioneer period, European missionaries studied plants, animals, and the environment, in order

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<sup>1</sup> This article uses three terms to define time periods in the spread of the gospel in the South Pacific: roots, shoots, and fruit. See pp. 52ff. for a more detailed history of the “roots” and “shoots” period.

to understand the cultures of the people they were serving.<sup>2</sup> For example, John Williams described the vegetation of the Hervey Islands in the Cook Islands, and gave descriptive information of its rocks, plants, and foliage.<sup>3</sup>

Before continuing, it will be good to know the definition of ecotheology, to help us understand the issue that we will be looking at in this paper. “Ecotheology” refers to the “theological discourse that highlights the whole household of creation, especially the world of nature as an interrelated system”.<sup>4</sup> The term “ecotheology” came into existence to deal with critics, who blamed Christianity for manipulating and exploiting nature.<sup>5</sup>

## PURPOSE

This paper aims to explore the environmental stewardship in traditional Papua New Guinea (PNG) cultures, and to find similarities in the Bible. Secondly, this paper will search for biblical, environmental stewardship, to develop a contextual theology for PNG, through effective contextualisation. Such effective contextualisation will emerge from the intra-textualisation method,<sup>6</sup> and the “theologising with concept” method.<sup>7</sup> This is because people do not like to see culture controlling the text. However, culture will only provide the context, but will allow the text to guide the contextualisation process. The “intra-textualisation” method refers to using the Bible as the starting point in theologising. The “theologising with concept” method refers to using local ideas, which align with biblical concepts. Palu makes the point that, to use culture, as the starting point in

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<sup>2</sup> Williams, John, *Missionary Enterprises in the South Sea Islands*, Philadelphia PA: Presbyterian Board of Publishing, 1888, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Williams, *Missionary Enterprises*, p. 24. Also refer to John M Hitchen, “Training ‘Tamate’: Formation of the 19th-Century Missionary Worldview: the Case of James Chalmers”, PhD dissertation, Aberdeen UK: University of Aberdeen, 1984, pp. 89-92.

<sup>4</sup> “Ecotheology”, <http://www.enotes.com/Ecotheology-reference/Ecotheology>, accessed March 7, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1. Such critics were blaming Christians, when referring to Gen 1:28. Lynn White Jr, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crises”, in *Science* 155-3767 (March 10, 1967), pp. 1203-1207, will give more background information.

<sup>6</sup> Ma’afu Palu, “Pacific Theology”, in *Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II 28 (2002), p. 40.

<sup>7</sup> Paulo Koria, “Moving Towards a Pacific Theology: Theologising with Concepts”, in *Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II 22 (1999), p. 3.

contextualisation will only lead to domesticated theology.<sup>8</sup> This research will help Christians to love God's creation, because of their love for God. Loving God's world is in line with the Cape Town Commitment, but such love is not "mere sentimental affection for nature, or pantheistic worship of nature".<sup>9</sup> The Cape Town Commitment states that:

We love the world of God's creation. This love is not mere sentimental affection for nature (which the Bible nowhere commands); still less is pantheistic worship of nature (which the Bible expressly forbids). Rather it is the logical outworking of our love for God, by caring for what belongs to Him. "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." The earth is the property of the God we claim to love and obey. We care for the earth, most simply because it belongs to the One whom we call Lord.<sup>10</sup>

A better understanding of biblical, environmental stewardship values, which align with PNG traditional cultures, will help believers to care for God's creation. This paper will also motivate PNG believers to see creation care as a holistic ministry, and not as a separate field of study. Discoveries from this research will help PNG people to understand their interrelatedness to the environment, thus deepening their biblical understanding of caring for the earth. When PNG Christians know the holistic issues surrounding the care of environment, the cultural concepts relating to environmental stewardship, and the biblical mandate for humans to care for the earth, they will see the importance of caring for the earth.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following questions will set the stage in dealing with the issues presented in this paper. Firstly, what does the Bible say about environmental stewardship? This question will help readers to see the importance of environmental stewardship, from a biblical perspective. Secondly, what were traditional PNG attitudes to environmental

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<sup>8</sup> Palu, "Pacific Theology", p. 39.

<sup>9</sup> "For the Lord We Love: The Cape Town Confession of Faith: part 1", in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 35-2 (April 2011), p. 64.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

stewardship? Thirdly, which cultural practices of environmental stewardship relate to scriptural stewardship practices? Biblical understanding is crucial to help in critically analysing environmental issues holistically. Finally, how can PNG Christians actively participate in environmental stewardship? This question will help churches become holistically involved in environmental issues, rather than just watching developers destroying the environment.

In addition, these questions can create awareness regarding Melanesian cultural concepts of inseparability and interrelatedness of humankind and nature. Furthermore, these questions will help believers in PNG to value the importance of biblical, environmental stewardship. They can revive good cultural environmental stewardship, and seek the Bible for solutions to problems affecting the environment.

### **TRADITIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP**

According to Ole, “the Melanesian concept of creation [stems from the] people’s relationship to the earth and environment, with all their contents, visible and invisible”.<sup>11</sup> For Melanesians, “this understanding of [land and environment] being inseparably interrelated and interdependent to nature gives Melanesians a sense of reverence and care for creation”.<sup>12</sup> Such thoughts gives Papua New Guineans hope that they have something to contribute from their own culture towards environmental stewardship.

### **TABOOS AND TOTEMISM**

One way, in which PNG people conserved the environment, was through the laws handed down from their ancestors in relation to taboos and totemism. For example, the Northern Massim people of Milne Bay did not eat certain birds, which were totems of their clans.<sup>13</sup> They believed that, if somebody ate their totem birds, they would have swollen stomachs.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, the

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<sup>11</sup> Ronnie Tom Ole, “Making Sense of the Oneness of Life: A Melanesian Christian View on Creation, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 6-2 (1990), p. 34.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Gabriel Seligman, *The Melanesians of British New Guinea*, Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1910, p. 680.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 688.

Gawa people of Milne Bay gave their totem birds to other people to eat if they caught them.<sup>15</sup> They also respected their totemic plants, and avoided injuring them.

For celebrations, the Iwa people of Milne Bay Province did not wear feathers of the birds of their totem.<sup>16</sup> The Osiwasio tribes in Milne Bay did not eat wild pigs, but sold them to the people of Kiriwina.<sup>17</sup> Many tribes in PNG did not eat plants or animals that were symbols, or totems, of their clans. By adhering to their tribal laws and obligations, they were practising their traditional environmental stewardship. Without the traditional laws regarding totems, the people could deplete the animals and plants.

There were taboos that helped in protecting animals and plants as well. In Hula village, Central Province, young women, who were tattooed, did not eat octopus in the olden days. The people believed that, when the women ate octopus, the lemon thorn used in tattooing would stick to their skins.<sup>18</sup> There were other taboos relating to mourning, feasting, agriculture, and other customary laws as well as traditional protocols regarding deaths, births, and marriage. Cliff Bird sees the importance of these unwritten and non-textual sources as they convey meaningful information on the values and practices of traditional environmental stewardship.<sup>19</sup> This is so true in the Pacific and PNG, because the people come from an oral society, and they preserved their thoughts and beliefs through oral traditions.

### ***Food Restrictions***

While the taboos and totems were helpful in protecting the environment, the people could suffer from malnutrition or other disease by not eating enough

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 680.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 688.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> The author's late maternal grandmother, Kali Ani (nee Papuka), of Hula village, Central Province, told him about this taboo.

<sup>19</sup> Cliff Bird, "Hermeneutics of Ecology and its Relationship to the Identity of the Oikos in Oceania", in *Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II 46 (2011), p. 22, quoting from Paul Van Tongeren, "The Relationship of Narrativity and Hermeneutics to an Adequate Practical Ethic", in *Ethical Perspectives* 1-2 (June 1994), pp. 60-67, citing various works of Paul Ricoeur listed in the Bibliography at *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

protein. This was especially true when it came to mourning the death of a loved one. Close relatives stopped eating the favourite food of the deceased. Such restrictions ended after the mortuary feast was held to put a headstone over the grave.<sup>20</sup> Food restrictions for mourning can last for six months or a year. It depends on the relatives of the deceased having enough food, garden produce, and money to hold the feast. Nowadays, such practices are slowly changing, because of modernisation, and all of the hard work and money involved.

### **PROTECTING PLANTS AND ANIMALS**

The author's maternal grandfather told him to throw back into the sea, tiny fish caught in the net. People use tiny dead fish or crabs and other marine creatures for bait. Anglers, who caught small fish on their fishing lines, also threw them back into the sea. The people only kept fish and other marine products that were fit for consumption.<sup>21</sup> These practices maintained traditional conservation methods, which allowed fish and other marine products to multiply for future consumption.

In the Highlands, when women dig sweet potatoes (*kaukau*), they do not dig up everything. They leave the small *kaukau* in the soil, and only harvest the big ones to cook for their families. The women practised what they had learnt from their ancestors, so that they would always have enough food to feed their families. These cultural values, in protecting plants and animals, have helped our people to maintain environmental stewardship in their daily lives.

### **TRADITIONAL BELIEF SYSTEM**

Apart from cultural practices, there are traditional concepts preserved in the beliefs of the people. For example, the Binandere people believed that humans, and all other things, both animate and inanimate, have similar

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<sup>20</sup> The Hood Bay people in Central Province practice such restrictions during mourning. The author's late mother had sores on her body, because she stopped eating certain foods after the death of her son.

<sup>21</sup> My maternal grandfather, the late Revd Ani Raka, of Hula, Hood Bay, Central Province, told me these marine conservation methods, when I was small boy.

rights.<sup>22</sup> Humans also have a custodial relationship towards trees, rivers, and the mountains, and the other living creatures have responsibilities towards the people.<sup>23</sup>

The beliefs, which the people had in relation to their responsibilities towards environmental care, resulted in the preservation of the environment for future generations. The community knew what to do, and they followed all the cultural regulations pertaining to environmental stewardship. Failure to keep the environmental laws resulted in punishment of offenders. These beliefs led to the maintenance of interrelatedness and interdependence in the community between the people and the environment. Figure 1 portrays this belief in a diagram showing a view of community by the Sentani in West Papua, Indonesia.

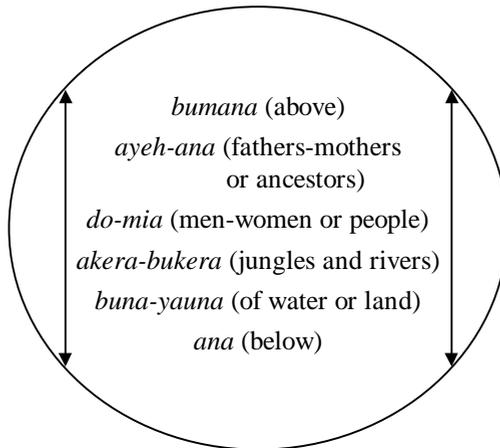


Figure 1: The Sentanian view of community, consisting of the world above and below, and all that is in between, all interrelated, interdependent, and holistic, which is similar to PNG and the South Pacific.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> John D. Waiko, "Traditional Conservation: Ethical Implications", in *Catalyst* 15-1 (1985), p. 16.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Joshua K Daimoi, "An Exploratory Missiological Study of Melanesian Ancestral Heritage from an Indigenous Evangelical Perspective", PhD dissertation, Sydney NSW: School of Studies on Religion, University of Sydney, June 2004, p. 113.

The Sentani worldview is typical of the worldview of Melanesians and Pacific islanders, and shows the importance of people maintaining relationship with the environment. When the people fail to maintain right relationships, through proper environmental care, they will destroy the relationships. It is important to maintain these traditional values, so that there is holistic harmony. By maintaining right relationships, people will respect and protect the environment.

Figure 1 confirms the “household of creation”, which defines ecotheology. The household of creation describes the interrelatedness between humankind and the environment. It is like a big house, with all living things existing as a family. Such a belief system is the way in which Melanesian cultures practised environmental stewardship.

Respecting the environment, and maintaining good relationships with the ecosystem is part of traditional PNG environmental stewardship. A Christian Leaders’ Training College student from Kavieng, New Ireland, told the author that his ancestors had a close relationship with eels, and the people in the area do not kill eels.<sup>25</sup> The Hood Bay people in Central Province practise the fallow system of agriculture by leaving their old gardens for some time, and ploughing the ground again after a few years. The *rikapa* (old garden) remains for three to four years to allow the land to rest.

All the taboos, totemic respect, diet restrictions, and bans on harvest during feasting are some ways of traditional environmental stewardship that existed in the olden times. Since Melanesian people were communally oriented, the community strictly adhered to their traditional ways. While there were many good aspects of culture, there were also bad aspects, which related to mourning, in the olden days. For instance, in some parts of Central Province, the people cut down banana trees, and killed the chicken owned by

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<sup>25</sup> The late Peter Matayai (BTh5 student in 2008) told the author this, after watching an EMTV tourism documentary, which showed footage about local people feeding the eels in Kavieng. People do not harm these eels, and they respect and treat them like human beings. People from the Western Solomon Islands also have a similar belief regarding an eel that gave birth to a woman, who later became their ancestor.

the deceased.<sup>26</sup> The next section will focus on how theology and the practices of the “roots and shoots” period prepared for, and contributed to, environmental stewardship.<sup>27</sup>

### FOCUS ON THE “ROOTS” AND “SHOOTS” PERIODS

During the “roots” period (1796-1880), and the “shoots” period (1840-1900), the term “ecothology” did not exist. However, missionaries became good anthropologists, as they started learning about the cultures of the people they served. Missionaries played a significant role in Alfred Cort Haddon’s interest in anthropology.<sup>28</sup> Previously, Haddon, a secular scientist, was interested in seashells, but this interest changed.<sup>29</sup>

Although the early missionaries in the Pacific were mostly interested in anthropology, their work also included environmental matters, as they studied the lives of the people. For example, George Turner, in his book, *Nineteen Years in Polynesia: Missionary Life, Travels, and Researches in the Islands of the Pacific*, wrote about plants used for clothing, the kava juice, and its religious significance, and the handicrafts from coconut, bamboo, and other plants.<sup>30</sup>

The Samoans used to play pigeon catching as a form of amusement, and the person who caught the highest number of birds was the winner.<sup>31</sup> The people distributed the pigeons, and baked some of them, while they kept

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<sup>26</sup> This bad cultural practice is now dying out. In the olden days, the people would also chop trees and others plants near the house of the deceased. Such actions showed that people had to remove things planted by the dead person, because it reminded them of the one they had lost.

<sup>27</sup> The “roots” period is the time when the early mission agencies started establishing themselves around 1796-1880. The next stage, “shoots”, was between 1840-1900, when the mission areas started spreading to other parts of the South Pacific.

<sup>28</sup> John M. Hitchen, “Relations Between Missiology and Anthropology: Then and Now: Insights from Contribution to Ethnography and Anthropology by Nineteenth-Century Missionaries in the South Pacific”, in *Missiology: An International Review* XXX-4 (October 2002), p. 457.

<sup>29</sup> Hitchen gave this information during his lecture on February 20, 2014.

<sup>30</sup> George Turner, *Nineteen Years in Polynesia: Missionary Life, Travels, and Researches in the Islands of the Pacific*, London UK: John Snow, 1861, p. 202.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

others for taming. Taming animals was one way in which Pacific islanders practised conservation without knowing about it. They did not have to attend schools or read books on conservation. It was a matter of trial and error, and on-the-job training. Likewise, in PNG, our ancestors also did the same. They knew how to care for animals, and did a good work.

John Williams gives a detailed description of the island groups, which comprise the Cook Islands. His book, *Missionary Enterprises in the South Sea Islands*, has so much useful information for mission historians. The second chapter of his book describes the foliage, the reefs, and other geographical features of the different islands.<sup>32</sup> This book demonstrates that the missionaries were greatly interested in the environment of the different island groups. They had carefully recorded details of animals, plants, and even distinguished those recently-introduced animals and plants. Captain Cook left two animals, which the Tanna people of New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) named them as *tangarooah*.<sup>33</sup>

Turner also described how the Tanna people planted yams, and stated that the sizes of the yams produced astonished him.<sup>34</sup> He noted that taro, breadfruit, coconuts, and sugarcane grew in abundance, and were the principle foods of the people. Even Pacific Island pioneer missionaries of the London Missionary Society (LMS) made careful observation of the local garden produce by writing them down in their diaries. For example, when Rau first visited Manumanu, Central Province, he carefully described the foods that the people brought, which were coconuts, sugarcane, and cooked fish.<sup>35</sup> Rau also took careful note of their environment, customs, and traditional beliefs.<sup>36</sup> The Cook Island missionaries also introduced new

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<sup>32</sup> Williams, *Missionary Enterprises in the South Sea Islands*, p. 23.

<sup>33</sup> Turner, *Nineteen Years in Polynesia*, p. 87.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Mata Tumu-Makara, "The Cook Islands Church Mission Heritage: Relaunching the Global Mission Activities of the Church", MTh dissertation, Auckland NZ: Laidlaw-Carey Graduate School of Theology, 2011, p. 38.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37-50. Rau was one of the first Cook Islands missionaries to be sent by the LMS, who landed at Manumanu, Central Province. His journals and letters described the culture, and the types of agricultural products in the area, which preserved very valuable information. His careful observation contributed to the importance of environmental and

foods, such as, watermelon, when they landed at Manumanu.<sup>37</sup> Such actions show that missionaries loved nature, and they appreciated introducing new foods to the people they served. A sweet potato still bears the name Piri, since the missionaries introduced it, and another species is Waunea.<sup>38</sup> Cook Island missionaries also returned home with PNG plants, especially coconuts and vine used for fish poison.<sup>39</sup>

Although the missionaries did not preach about conservation and environmental stewardship, their worldview and beliefs contributed to ecotheology. For instance, the strict Sunday observance also contributed to environmental stewardship. To this day, my people never go fishing, hunt, or do gardening on Sunday. This means that all creatures rest on this day. When the people do not go fishing, hunting, or gardening they do not disturb the environment.<sup>40</sup> In the early days, missionaries also ordered traders, planters, and even foreign businessmen, to adhere to a strict Sunday observance.<sup>41</sup>

## NATURAL HISTORY

Missionaries were also interested in natural history. William Ellis, in 1827 wrote about the natural history of the Sandwich Islands, Hawaii.<sup>42</sup> Two years later, Ellis produced *Polynesian Researches*, covering the Society and Sandwich Islands, which contained a four-volume mine of ethnographic

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cultural practices of that period. Rau's writings and letters, as well as reports from other Pacific Island missionaries, show how the British missionaries had trained these islanders to take careful notes, and be diligent in journalising.

<sup>37</sup> Marjorie Tuainekore Crocombe, "Ruatoka: A Cook Islander in Papuan History", in *Polynesian Missions in Melanesia: From Samoa, Cook Island and Tonga to Papua New Guinea and New Caledonia*, Suva Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies University of the South Pacific, 1982, p. 61.

<sup>38</sup> More information on introduced crops is in the endnotes of Crocombe's article.

<sup>39</sup> Refer to endnotes of Crocombe's article, also.

<sup>40</sup> This practice is similar to the mourning period, and other times of celebration, when people do not fish, hunt, or make gardens, because time is set aside to celebrate, mourn, or worship. That is how my people apply the concept of *velaga* (sacredness). After the celebration, mourning, or worship is over, then people can do what they want to do.

<sup>41</sup> Crocombe, "Ruatoka", p. 71.

<sup>42</sup> Hitchen, "Relations Between Missiology and Anthropology", p. 458.

data.<sup>43</sup> Williams emulated Ellis' interest in ethnography. To Williams, the missionary task also included detailed study and recording of cultural customs and habits.<sup>44</sup> Missionaries also contributed to scientific work. For instance, Chalmers contributed to scientific investigation to demonstrate more fully, "the glory of the works of God".<sup>45</sup> Chalmers' interest in botany and geography changed, after returning from furlough in 1887, to focus on anthropology and ethnography.<sup>46</sup>

The missionaries showed that they were concerned for ecotheology, regarding it as part of their calling. Therefore, they produced volumes of work on ethnography. Being involved in ethnography, they also played their part as stewards in recording and studying culture. Their interest in culture ties in with their role as environmental stewards, since the ecological aspects of their work is included in ethnography.<sup>47</sup> The next section will focus on a recent Pacific theologian, who has contributed significantly, in some ways, to environmental issues.

### REVD LESLIE BOSETO AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

The *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (IBMR) describes Leslie Boseto as the third leading theologian-statesman for being an effective leader in the Pacific islands.<sup>48</sup> He was the first Melanesian Moderator of the United church in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands (UCPNGSI), elected to office in 1972.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 459.

<sup>45</sup> Hitchen, "Training 'Tamate' ", p. 791

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 795. See also pp. 89- 92.

<sup>47</sup> Hitchen, "Relations Between Missiology and Anthropology", p. 457.

<sup>48</sup> The *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* places Boseto as the third significant theologian after Amanaki Havea (Tonga) and Ilaitia Sewati Tuwera (Fiji). Refer to Charles W. Forman, "Finding Our Own Voice: The Reinterpreting of Christianity by Oceanian Theologians", in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 29-3 (July 2005), pp. 115-122.

<sup>49</sup> In the mid-1990s, the UCPNGSI became two churches, because of the isolation, communication, and other needs in the Solomon Islands. Now, there is a separate church in PNG and Solomon Islands. Both churches have their own theological colleges and

Boseto was also the first Solomon Islands Bishop-elect at the formation of the United church in 1968.<sup>50</sup> Prior to the formation of the United church, he was the Synod Chairman, in 1966, of the Methodist church in the Solomon Islands. Boseto's wife, Hazel, was also a great women's leader. She was involved in the Solomon Islands Regional Women's Fellowship. Her attempt at the first regional meeting was successful, because she was a fluent speaker of the *Roviana* and *Babatana* languages.<sup>51</sup>

Boseto was ordained in 1964, after completing theological studies at the New Zealand Bible Training Institute (now Laidlaw College). Later, he attended the Rarongo (United church) Theological College for further studies. In 1991, his election as one of the Presidents of the World Council of Churches (WCC) was a milestone, as he became the first Pacific Islander and Melanesian to be elected to such a position.<sup>52</sup> As a member of the WCC Central Committee, others described him as an "authentic voice of the Pacific" in international gatherings.<sup>53</sup>

Above all, Boseto was an advocate of Melanesian theology about the environment. His passion for Melanesian theology is evident in some of his articles, which were published in church journals. He wrote "Environment

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moderators. However, the United churches in both countries still consult with each other, from time to time.

<sup>50</sup> Lucy H. Money, "First Marama Bishop", in *Ever-widening Circles: Stories of Some Influential Methodist Workers in Solomon Islands and Bougainville/Buka*, Auckland NZ: Wesleyan Historical Society, 2002, p. 22.

<sup>51</sup> Two important languages of the Solomon Islands.

<sup>52</sup> Ann Hogan, "Leslie Boseto: First Solomon Island Bishop", in *Ever-widening Circles: Stories of Some Influential Methodist Workers in Solomon Islands and Bougainville/Buka*, Auckland NZ: Wesleyan Historical Society, 2002, p. 23.

<sup>53</sup> Forman "Finding Our Own Voice, p. 116.

and Community in Melanesia”,<sup>54</sup> “The Gift of Community”,<sup>55</sup> and “Do Not Separate us From Our Land and Sea”.<sup>56</sup>

Apart from environmental issues, Boseto was instrumental in calling for unity among the Pacific Island churches. According to Boseto, God prepared the Melanesian people for the gospel by making them community minded. In his theological writings, Boseto appealed for indigenised theology. To Boseto, the gospel was universal, but needed contextualisation for interpretation in terms of the local culture.<sup>57</sup> In his book, *I Have a Strong Belief*,<sup>58</sup> Boseto stated that people had to be first in his ministry.

His belief in putting people first resulted in numerous visits to many parts of the Solomon Islands, after he completed his term as the Moderator for the United church. Such visits, made during two years, enabled him to learn about the needs of his people. From the trips to different communities, he was deeply concerned about environmental damage to the islands. According to this Solomon Islands’ Christian statesman, loving God also meant loving His handiwork, the earth. He urged the people to protect God’s creation, because, neglecting the environment, angered God. By calling for the protection of the environment, he was adding social ethics into his theology.

While Boseto was on the WCC Committee, and as one of the Presidents, momentum was starting to develop on the call for “Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation” (JPIC). Such a move was relevant to Melanesia, as our people consider the environment, as part of their existence.

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<sup>54</sup> Leslie Boseto, “Environment and Community in Melanesia”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 1-2 (1985), pp. 166-174.

<sup>55</sup> Leslie Boseto, “The Gift of Community”, in *International Review of Mission* 72-288 (1983), pp. 582-583.

<sup>56</sup> Leslie Boseto, “Do Not Separate us From Our Land and Sea”, in *Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II 13 (1995), pp. 69-72.

<sup>57</sup> Forman, “Finding Our Own Voice”, p. 116.

<sup>58</sup> Leslie Boseto, *I Have a Strong Belief: the Reverend Leslie Boseto’s Own Story of His Eight Years as the First Melanesian Moderator of the United Church in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands*, Madang PNG: Unichurch Books, 1983, p. 76.

The purpose of the emphasis on JPIC was to “unite the whole of creation to God by love”.<sup>59</sup> This renewal of interest in the environment was nothing new to Melanesians, because the people have close links with nature. Boseto’s interest did not stop at the global level, through the WCC, but was utilised in the regional sphere as well. As the Minister for Home Affairs in the Solomon Island government, Boseto was instrumental in bringing peace and reconciliation on Bougainville in 1992.<sup>60</sup>

The Bougainville saga emerged from mining and environmental issues on the island. Davidson stressed the economic exploitation and ecological destruction, which came through the huge copper mine, and which did not consider ethnic identity, thus resulting in 10 years of civil war, with the loss of many lives.<sup>61</sup> Being from the Western Solomons, Boseto was, indeed, helping his own neighbours, as a former leading churchman.<sup>62</sup>

Few United church ministers have taken the call by Boseto seriously. The only one who has written on this is Ronnie Tom Ole, from Hula, Central Province. His article entitled, “Making Sense of the Oneness of Life: A Melanesian Christian View on Creation”, is worth reading.<sup>63</sup> He recommends that a united life become an alternative way to today’s life with issues regarding people, nature, modern technology, and science.<sup>64</sup>

Boseto’s plea for the respect of human life and the environment still echoes in the Pacific. American Samoan theologian, Ama’amalele Tofaeno’s doctoral dissertation titled, “Eco-theology: *Aiga* – the Household of Life”,

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<sup>59</sup> Christopher Garland, “Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 6-1 (1990), p. 24.

<sup>60</sup> Allan K. Davidson, “‘The Pacific is No Longer a Mission Field’: Conversion in the South Pacific in the 20th Century”, in *Christianity Reborn: the Global Expansion of Evangelicalism in the 20th Century*, Donald M. Lewis, ed., Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004, p. 152.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> From 1968 to 1991, Revd Boseto was with the Melanesian Council of Churches and the Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA), and, at one stage, was the chairman of both ecumenical bodies.

<sup>63</sup> Ronnie Tom Ole, “Making Sense of the Oneness of Life: A Melanesian Christian View on Creation, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 6-2 (1990), pp. 33-41.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

makes the point worth noting.<sup>65</sup> What is worth noting is that this Samoan clergyman has studied his cultural environmental ethos and recognises the similarities in the Samoan and the biblical views regarding the environment. Tofaeno's dissertation powerfully contextualises the concept of *aiga*, or family, in Samoan social life, which includes the whole family of creation. This dissertation shows the need to recapture traditional values, and relate them to Christianity.<sup>66</sup> Tofaeno's work considers the Bible by taking into consideration the biblical purpose of God as the producer of "sustainable life in communion and unity of all things in creation".<sup>67</sup>

### ECUMENISM AND AUTHENTIC THEOLOGY

All this theological thinking has surfaced because the theological interpretation and work is the product of Pacific islanders. This surge of fresh thinking stems from ecumenism, through the Pacific Conference of Churches and the Pacific Theological College. However, Pacific islanders need to keep theologising to keep abreast of social, political, and economic developments affecting the region. The focus on ecotheology refers to the totality of life, and it does not single out the environment, because God placed humans on earth to care for it.

Boseto also believed that God, as the Creator, is concerned for the whole world, the very tiny things, as well as huge mountains, and the oceans.<sup>68</sup> He reiterates that undisciplined structures and uncontrolled systems are a hindrance to mission and development, unless God's love becomes the focal point.<sup>69</sup> According to Boseto, discussion papers, textbooks, or five-year programs will not provide any answers to humankind's needs.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Forman, "Finding Our Own Voice, p. 118, quoting Ama'amalele Tofaeno, "Eco-theology: *Aiga* – the Household of Life", PhD dissertation (in German), Neuendettelsau Germany: Erlangen fur Mission und Okumene, 2000, p. 217.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Leslie Boseto, "Mission and Development: the Role of the Church", in Jeffrey Wall, ed., *Melanesia: the Church and the Future, Point 1* (1978), p. 33.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

For Boseto, development includes people, therefore, the church must not function in isolation, but utilise its people, to participate in the struggle for liberation, to develop their intellectual, physical, social, and spiritual abilities.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, Boseto alludes to “translating global programs into diverse cultural, political, and religious contextual situations”, to unite people, and not just doctrines, theologies, and institutions.<sup>72</sup>

This belief, when applied to ecotheology, is that ordinary Christians need to theologise, and that trained clergy (both men and women) provide guidance, so that God’s people all contribute meaningfully in development. Boseto concurs with Narokobi’s stance on integral human development, which, he states, supports the theme of “the gospel for the whole man, and the whole community”.<sup>73</sup> This means that humankind and the environment relate to each other. It is wrong to exclude people, when discussing environmental issues, and vice versa. Issues that affect the environment also affect humankind.

Finally, Boseto’s conviction on unity comes from nature. He defines solidarity as, “small fish diving in and jumping together, when chased by a big shark or fish”.<sup>74</sup> This means that God’s people in the Pacific must unite to face challenges, such as, nuclear power, transnational corporations, religious movements, and the international economic systems. All these issues also affect the environment.

The next section will analyse and critique the ecotheological issues that have affected PNG, and suggest ways to help churches to be vocally involved in environmental stewardship as part of their mission.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>72</sup> Leslie Boseto, “The Narrative: Reunion of His Graduating Class from the Bible Training Institute, Auckland, New Zealand”, a speech presented at the Reunion for the 1958 Graduates on February 4, 2008. Dr John Hitchen gave this paper to me.

<sup>73</sup> Boseto, “Mission and Development”, p. 35.

<sup>74</sup> Boseto, “The Gift of Community”, in *International Review of Mission* 72-288 (1983), p. 582.

## CRITICAL SUGGESTIONS

This author writes to inform and create awareness, so that believers can be aware of their ecology, and refer to the Bible and their cultures, to develop relevant theology. The author believes that humans and the environment are interrelated and interdependent. This forms the Melanesian view of “oneness with the environment”.<sup>75</sup> With rapid modernisation, Melanesians seem to forget their environment in relation to missions and theology. For most people, it is the social and economic implications that create concern for the environment.

The secular world seems to be very concerned about conservation issues that affect the environment. However, for believers, they have to love God’s creation, because He is the Lord over nature. While some may want to express new ideas for ecotheology, others opt to readjust their theologies to address social and ecological issues. Dr Margaret Guite disagrees with the new theologies, but calls for getting “back to the old theology, and get the balance right”.<sup>76</sup> Guite also states that we do not need a “one-sided interpretation of our tradition” in regard to ecology and human interdependency.<sup>77</sup> However, this writer refutes such statements, because Melanesians need to reinterpret their theology, according to their own context. Without looking critically at one’s own culture and traditions, there will be no contextualisation. The gospel will be meaningless, and may not apply to the Melanesian context.

However, Evangelicals need to get back to the biblical teaching regarding creation, because “the earth is the Lord’s and everything in it”.<sup>78</sup> We cannot claim to love God while abusing what “belongs to Christ by right of creation, redemption, and inheritance”.<sup>79</sup> The Cape Town Commitment also

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<sup>75</sup> Ole, “Making Sense of the Oneness of Life”, p. 40.

<sup>76</sup> Mai Ori, “The Implications of Integrity of Creation for Theological Education and Evangelisation”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 6-2 (1990), p. 28, quoting Margaret Guite, “The Integrity of Creation: Do We Need a New Theology?”, in *Anvil* 7-1 (1990), p. 21.

<sup>77</sup> Ori, “The Implications of Integrity of Creation”, p. 28.

<sup>78</sup> Ps 24:1 (NIV).

<sup>79</sup> “For the Lord We Love”, p. 64.

calls for Christians to repent for their part in destruction of the environment, and for waste, and pollution.<sup>80</sup> Simultaneously, it urges Evangelicals to commit themselves to “prophetic ecological responsibility, and environmental advocacy and action”.<sup>81</sup>

According to David Wilkinson, bearing God’s image is about relationship with God more than any specific human attribute, or pattern of behaviour.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, this relationship involves “sharing in the creative, sustaining dominion of God, thus acting as the visible representatives of His benevolent care for creation”.<sup>83</sup> Therefore, Wilkinson states that there must be Christlike stewardship. So, human beings need to act like servants, and not dictators.<sup>84</sup> This author concurs with Wilkinson’s statement, so that people can act in a Christ-like way to the environment. In addition, Christians need to proclaim environmental responsibility as a “consequence of living under the lordship of Christ”.<sup>85</sup>

The author looks at environmental stewardship from a relational view. Melanesians can describe stewardship in terms of relationships. For example, when someone lends his or her spade to another person, the recipient has to take good care of that item. If the recipient fails to take care of the spade, then that relationship is destroyed. Asians also share this same view, in their cultural understanding of the present-day ecological crises. Pui-Lan Kwok laments that the present ecological crises in Asia are the result of the “breaking down of the great chain that connects human beings, all sentient things, and nature”.<sup>86</sup> Kwok’s comment echoes the concern that the Ok Tedi people had in pursuing a legal battle with BHP in Australia,

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> David Wilkinson, “Bigger Than We Think: the Doctrine of Creation Goes Deeper Than Just Explaining How the World Began”, in *Christianity Today*, 57-2 (March 20, 2013), p. 29.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Pui-Lan Kwok, “Ecology and the Recycling of Christianity”, in *Constructive Christian Theology in the Worldwide Church*, William R. Barr, ed., Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1997, p. 268.

resulting in the Ninth Supplement.<sup>87</sup> From the Ok Tedi experience, the Ninth Supplement Agreement was a conspiracy between the PNG government and BHP to come up with legislation to strike out the environmental issues.<sup>88</sup>

The letter, which David Dakop and his friends wrote, shows how BHP used its money to silence the people, and settle the environmental issues out of court. The actions of the company show that it was using its money to appease the people. Finally, this paper seeks to deal with contextualising environmental stewardship for PNG churches, so that they can look at these issues critically, biblically, and holistically. Without a contextual theology, only secular groups will actively promote environmental conservation in PNG. PNG Christians need to be vocal in promoting environmental concerns among the grassroots people, so that they can be active participants.

### **CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY PROPOSED FOR PNG**

This paper will first look at Polynesian theologians, because they have written so much on contextualisation, and developed different methods to develop local theologies. After evaluating their writing, the author will propose a Melanesian theology of environmental stewardship.

In the 1990s, there was so much attention given by Christians regarding environmental issues.<sup>89</sup> Mainline and Evangelical churches in PNG have all their done their part, in some way, through seminars and conferences. However, this is not enough. Polynesians have taken the lead, through writing theses, and developing local theologies. It seems that Christian leaders do not really understand much about contextualisation.

People misunderstood the leading South Pacific theologian on contextualisation, the late Amanaki Havea. Forman describes him as the

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<sup>87</sup> David Dakop, Karung Dumun, Jacob Aron, "Objection re: OTML", in *Kommuniti Nius* 3-1 (December 2003), p. 3, a letter to the Supreme Court of Victoria, January 7, 2004. The Ninth Supplement was a legal change made to suit BHP, and the people received money for the damage caused to their environment.

<sup>88</sup> Dakop and his friends wrote about the Ninth Supplement Agreement in their letter to the Supreme Court of Victoria.

<sup>89</sup> This was the same period in which Boseto and others talked openly on environment.

“father of Pacific theology”,<sup>90</sup> but other Pacific theologians did not understand the message he was proclaiming. As a pioneer, he had to start somewhere. Fellow Tongan, Roman Catholic theologian, Mikaele Paunga, said that “coconut theology” faded to obscurity, because it demeaned Pacific islanders as “coconut people”.<sup>91</sup> This author disagrees, because the coconut, in Melanesia, is still useful for oil, making brooms, for shelter, and for food. Paunga does not realise that coconut theology was theology from church leaders, and that ordinary believers were not theologising.

Randall Prior rightly stresses the coconut as a symbol of Pacific theology.<sup>92</sup> However, he is wrong to say that such theology does not address pressing social issues.<sup>93</sup> The concept of coconut theology comes from the Pacific islanders’ struggle to be free from theological imperialism.

PNG born, Epeli Hau’ofa, of Tonga, urges Pacific theologians to look into their own cultures for inspiration.<sup>94</sup> Havea could be right but, as Dr Ma’afu Palu points out, the process of contextualisation must start from the Bible.<sup>95</sup> While Ma’afu’s strategy is correct, this author opts for Paulo Koria’s “Moving Towards a Pacific Theology: Theologising with Concepts”, which is a simple step in contextualisation.<sup>96</sup> Often, Melanesian people think in terms of concepts. Therefore, this paper will use Koria’s terminology, but will add some meaningful steps, to help ordinary people to understand the contextualisation process. Koria’s theology of concepts appears to be weak, since it did not look into the New Testament, and lacked critical

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<sup>90</sup> Charles W. Forman, “The Study of Pacific Island Christianity: Achievements, Resources, Needs”, in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 18-3 (July 1994), p. 116.

<sup>91</sup> Mikaele Paunga, “Contours of Contextual Theologies from Oceania”, in *Chakana* 1-2 (2003), p. 56.

<sup>92</sup> Randall Prior, “I Am the Coconut of Life: an Evaluation of Coconut Theology”, in *Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II 10 (1993), p. 31.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>94</sup> Epeli Hau’ofa, “Our Sea of Islands”, in *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands*, Eric Waddell, Vijay Naidu, Epeli Hau’ofa, eds, Suva Fiji: University of the South Pacific, 1993, pp. 2-16, quoted in Mikaele Paunga, “Contours of Contextual Theologies”, p. 52.

<sup>95</sup> Palu, “Pacific Theology”, p. 41.

<sup>96</sup> Koria, “Moving Towards a Pacific Theology”, p. 3.

contextualising. However, to be fair, contextualisation is a long process, and can take many years before people accept and embrace it.

This author proposes the following ways to get a clear and meaningful biblical contextualisation. To start with, theologians need to identify a biblical concept related to their culture. Then, they will need to exegete the scriptures, and study the concepts within an Old and New Testament context. After that, theologians and believers need to test the ideas, and evaluate them, in terms of interpretation. The last step is to make the final application.

To develop a Melanesian theology of environmental stewardship, one has to look into the account of creation to discover similar beliefs. The first concept that comes to mind is God's care for humankind and the environment (Gen 1:28). That is the start of environmental stewardship. The directive (in Gen 1:28) shows that God cares about the environment, and about people's welfare. God gave the directive to man to fill the earth and subdue it, but, at the same time, to care for the earth. In the KJV version of the Bible, there is a third command, for man to "replenish the earth". To replenish means to "fill up again". Kadiba states that man has failed to abide by the third directive from God.<sup>97</sup> In addition, rule and subdue refers to man as "creation's servant, and should not exercise despotic authority over nature, but the welfare of the non-human world above its own".<sup>98</sup>

The *Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary* states that the steward was the old English word for a house warden.<sup>99</sup> Now, the term means someone who is responsible for food supplies in a club, or an attendant on a ship or aircraft, or an official, supervising a meeting. In some churches, a steward

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<sup>97</sup> John Kadiba, "Ethics and Development: a Theological Perspective", in Gernot Fugmann, ed., *Ethics and Development in Papua New Guinea*, Point 9 (1986), p. 57.

<sup>98</sup> Fred Van Dyke, David C. Mahan, Joseph K. Sheldon, Raymond H. Brand, *Redeeming Creation: the Biblical Basis for Environmental Stewardship*, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1996, p. 39.

<sup>99</sup> Bruce Moore, "steward", in *Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary*, Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 1083.

is a person who arranges the chairs, cleans the church building, sets up the music instruments, and does other duties required by the pastor.<sup>100</sup>

In the New Testament, Paul urged the Corinthians to become a community of stewards (1 Cor 4:1-2). A community of stewards will help minimise environmental pollution and damage.<sup>101</sup> Simultaneously, God has entrusted believers with the “secret things of God” (mysteries). They have to operate as a community of stewards. Importantly, PNG churches must know all about their role as stewards of God’s resources.

In Genesis, God told Adam to “cultivate and guard” the land.<sup>102</sup> The word “cultivate” means to serve the earth, or be a slave to it.<sup>103</sup> In addition, “to keep” שָׁמַר (*sāmar*) in Hebrew, means “to preserve, protect, and maintain the land”.<sup>104</sup> This means that the stewardship, started in Genesis, continues in the New Testament. Therefore, believers need to understand godly stewardship, and speak against issues that affect the environment. The PNG Council of Churches and the Evangelical Alliance in PNG also need to play their role.

Secondly, this paper will focus on similar steps of stewardship in Melanesia. The Tok Pisin term *lukautim*, which means “to care, or look after” is a relevant word to use. As stated earlier, *lukautim* is not just caring, but there is a relational concept attached. A particular student has always left his things with the author, whenever he leaves the college. This student has left his things in the author’s care, because he sees the author as a close friend, and a spiritual father.

Evaluating the cultural concept of environmental stewardship in PNG shows that our human relationship to the land and natural resources is the cause of

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<sup>100</sup> Current second-year MTh student, Sione Lokotui, was a steward in his church back in Tonga arranging chairs, putting out the musical instruments, and organising the seating arrangements for important occasions, and ensuring that everything was in order.

<sup>101</sup> Van Dyke, et al, *Redeeming Creation*, p. 39.

<sup>102</sup> See Gen 2:15 (GNB).

<sup>103</sup> Van Dyke, et al, *Redeeming Creation*, p. 96.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

many disputes in this country.<sup>105</sup> People cannot part with their land and their natural resources, such as, gas, oil, gold, silver, and copper, which belong to the landowners, while PNG law states that everything below the surface of the land belongs to the state.

On the other hand, the Bible clearly states that all things belong to God.<sup>106</sup> There is a conflict, and a dilemma, but the churches have failed to theologise to answer the needs of the people. How does the idea of communal ownership, state ownership, and sovereign ownership relate to godly stewardship? There has to be a balance, somewhere, somehow.

In the concept of “community of stewards”,<sup>107</sup> there is an answer to the problem of stewardship, caused by the different views of ownership. The stewards “are responsible for managing a household . . . but . . . are not the owners or masters”.<sup>108</sup> The idea of stewards ties in with the definition of ecotheology, which means, “the whole household of creation”.<sup>109</sup>

The illustration of a household steward (1 Cor 4:2) shows that the steward was to be faithful in dispensing to the household everything entrusted to him.<sup>110</sup> In the same way, ministers are to expound nothing more or less than the whole counsel of God.<sup>111</sup> It pictures ministers (or theologians) as stewards in God’s household standing between the householder and God’s household.<sup>112</sup> This is where accountability and responsibility come, in terms of theologising and contextualising. The onus is now on theologians to theologise well, to answer issues affecting the environment, and develop relevant theologies to guide the people.

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<sup>105</sup> Resource owners feel intimidated, and young people have used this opportunity to block roads and harass the developers. This has created lawlessness, and produces a bad image of PNG in the overseas media.

<sup>106</sup> Ps 24:1, and 1 Cor 10:26.

<sup>107</sup> 1 Cor 4:1-2.

<sup>108</sup> Dachollom C. Datiri, “1 Corinthians”, in *Africa Bible Commentary*, Tokunboh Adeyemo, ed., Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2006, p. 1381.

<sup>109</sup> “Ecotheology”.

<sup>110</sup> Donald Pickerill, “1 Corinthians”, in *Spirit Filled Life Bible*, Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson, 1991, p. 1723.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

To test this concept, the idea of stewardship starts in the Old Testament, portraying God as the rightful owner. In the New Testament, the community of stewards acted on God's behalf. Culturally, Papua New Guineans regard the environment as belonging to a high God, so they respected the environment. Traditionally, people did not go to sacred mountains and other areas, since they believed that spirits dwelled there. They believed that spirits own those sacred places, so they did not disturb the environment.<sup>113</sup> According to the Garaina people in Morobe Province, anyone who cuts a tree must tell the tree the reasons why the people are cutting it down.<sup>114</sup> This is cultural, environmental stewardship, preserved in a customary practice. These days, people just cut trees down without any good reason. People do not care what they are doing to the environment.

Recently, the author heard of some examples from colleagues and students at CLTC. A faculty wife told the author about how her father is the only one in her village who cleans a spring. When other people clean the area, the water gets muddy.<sup>115</sup> Another student saw a man in his village tie a coconut leaf to stop floodwaters going higher.<sup>116</sup> If this man did not tie the coconut leaf, the flood would spread higher.

The final test in this paper is a word study method, to determine the proper understanding and meaning of the concept, according to the Bible. This paper will look at the biblical definition of stewardship.

**Οἰκονομία** (*oikonomia*) is a compound word in Greek meaning the management of a household.<sup>117</sup> The idea of stewards started during the time

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<sup>113</sup> In some places, such beliefs do not exist, but in other places, such as, Milne Bay, people do not make a noise when they walk past hot springs, and they still practise this belief, to respect the guardians of the environment.

<sup>114</sup> Henoma Ttopogogo, a masters student, shared this concept in a class discussion in 2013. This customary practice of environmental stewardship no longer applies.

<sup>115</sup> The spring knows the owner, and there is a relationship. So, when the owner cleans the spring, there is clean, crystal-clear water. Mary Asi, a schoolteacher of Tauruba, Central Province, gave this information to the author.

<sup>116</sup> BTh4 student, Nathan Mairife, of Koiken, East Sepik Province, gave the information to the author.

<sup>117</sup> Everett F. Harrison, "οἰκονομία (*oikonomia*)", in *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, Walter A. Elwell, ed., Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1973, p. 502.

of slavery.<sup>118</sup> A rich man could appoint a slave to administer his household, and in teaching and disciplining the other slaves and children. A classic example is Joseph (Gen 39:4-4).

*The NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words* defines οἰκονομία (*oikonomia*) as “management of a household”, but was extended to the administration of the state than to any kind of activity resulting from the holding of an office.<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, οἰκονόμος (*oikonomos*) was used of people, and has a more concrete meaning. It denotes the house steward, and, by extension, the managers of individual departments within a household.<sup>120</sup> However, metaphorically, οἰκονόμος (*oikonomos*) also refers to preachers teaching God’s Word (1 Cor 4:1), characters of elders (Titus 1:7), and believers, and the use of their gifts in ministering to each other (1 Pet 4:10).<sup>121</sup>

Therefore to apply biblical stewardship to the environment, preachers must contextualise environmental issues faithfully. Believers need to be Christ-like in dealing with the ecosystem, and that all Christians must utilise their gifts in promoting environmental stewardship.<sup>122</sup>

## SUMMARY

The first question, “What does the Bible say about environmental stewardship?” is answered in the fifth section, headed “Critical Suggestions”, through Gen 1:28. The second section, headed “Traditional Environmental Stewardship”, answers the question regarding PNG’s attitude to environmental stewardship. That section states that people and the environment are inseparable and interrelated. The answer for the third question focusing on the similarities of the Bible and PNG culture is in section three, headed “Focus on the Roots and Shoots Period”. Section three

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Verlyn D. Verbruge, ed., *The NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2000, p. 897.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White Jr, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, London UK: Thomas Nelson, 1996, p. 599.

<sup>122</sup> This phrase sums up the author’s thinking on a contextual theology for PNG, regarding environmental stewardship, and the church needs to play a leading role in this.

suggests that the *velaga*, or taboo, is similar to Sunday observance. The final question, regarding how PNG Christians can actively participate in environmental stewardship, is in section four, headed “Revd Leslie Boseto and Environmental Issues”, which focuses on the life of Revd Boseto, and section five, headed “Critical Suggestions”, containing critical suggestions.

## CONCLUSION

This paper, therefore, concurs with the concept that “poor theology” has resulted in environmental degradation.<sup>123</sup> To prevent this, churches must faithfully teach, theologise, and contextualise God’s word. The work of environmental stewardship must be the responsibility of the community. Failure to develop a contextual theology will result in serious repercussions.

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<sup>123</sup> Richard Storey, Nicola Hoggard Creegen, “Why Christians Must Care for the Earth”, in *New Vision New Zealand* 111 (2008), Auckland NZ: Tabernacle Books, 2008, p. 139. Faulty theology can result in more environmental degradation in PNG.

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